

# The Book of Wonder

Marco Polo



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# **THE BOOK OF WONDER**

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
**JOHN MASEFIELD**





**Gaetano Bonutti,**  
*Venetian Traveller Marco Polo, c. 1295.*  
Engraving. Hulton Archive/Getty Images.



# CONTENT

[Prologue & Itinerary](#)

[PROLOGUE](#)

[ITINERARY](#)

[Book I](#)

[CHAPTER 1](#)

[CHAPTER 2](#)

[CHAPTER 3](#)

[CHAPTER 4](#)

[CHAPTER 5](#)

[CHAPTER 6](#)

[CHAPTER 7](#)

[CHAPTER 8](#)

[CHAPTER 9](#)

[CHAPTER 10](#)

[CHAPTER 11](#)

[CHAPTER 12](#)

[CHAPTER 13](#)

[CHAPTER 14](#)

[CHAPTER 15](#)

[CHAPTER 16](#)

[CHAPTER 17](#)

[CHAPTER 18](#)

[CHAPTER 19](#)

[CHAPTER 20](#)

[CHAPTER 21](#)

[CHAPTER 22](#)

[CHAPTER 23](#)

[CHAPTER 24](#)

[CHAPTER 25](#)

[CHAPTER 26](#)

[CHAPTER 27](#)

[CHAPTER 28](#)

[CHAPTER 29](#)

[CHAPTER 30](#)

[Book II.](#)

[CHAPTER 31](#)

[CHAPTER 32](#)

[CHAPTER 33](#)

[CHAPTER 34](#)

[CHAPTER 35](#)

[CHAPTER 36](#)

[CHAPTER 37](#)

[CHAPTER 38](#)

[CHAPTER 39](#)

[CHAPTER 40](#)

[CHAPTER 41](#)

[CHAPTER 42](#)

[CHAPTER 43](#)

[CHAPTER 44](#)

[CHAPTER 45](#)

[CHAPTER 46](#)

[CHAPTER 47](#)

[CHAPTER 48](#)

[CHAPTER 49](#)

[CHAPTER 50](#)

[CHAPTER 51](#)

[CHAPTER 52](#)

[CHAPTER 53](#)

[CHAPTER 54](#)

[CHAPTER 55](#)

[CHAPTER 56](#)

[Book III](#)

[CHAPTER 57](#)



[CHAPTER 58](#)

[CHAPTER 59](#)

[CHAPTER 60](#)

[CHAPTER 61](#)

[CHAPTER 62](#)

[CHAPTER 63](#)

[CHAPTER 64](#)

[CHAPTER 65](#)

[CHAPTER 66](#)

[CHAPTER 67](#)

[CHAPTER 68](#)

[CHAPTER 69](#)

[CHAPTER 70](#)

[CHAPTER 71](#)

[CHAPTER 72](#)

[CHAPTER 73](#)

[CHAPTER 74](#)

[CHAPTER 75](#)

[CHAPTER 76](#)

[CHAPTER 77](#)

[CHAPTER 78](#)

[CHAPTER 79](#)

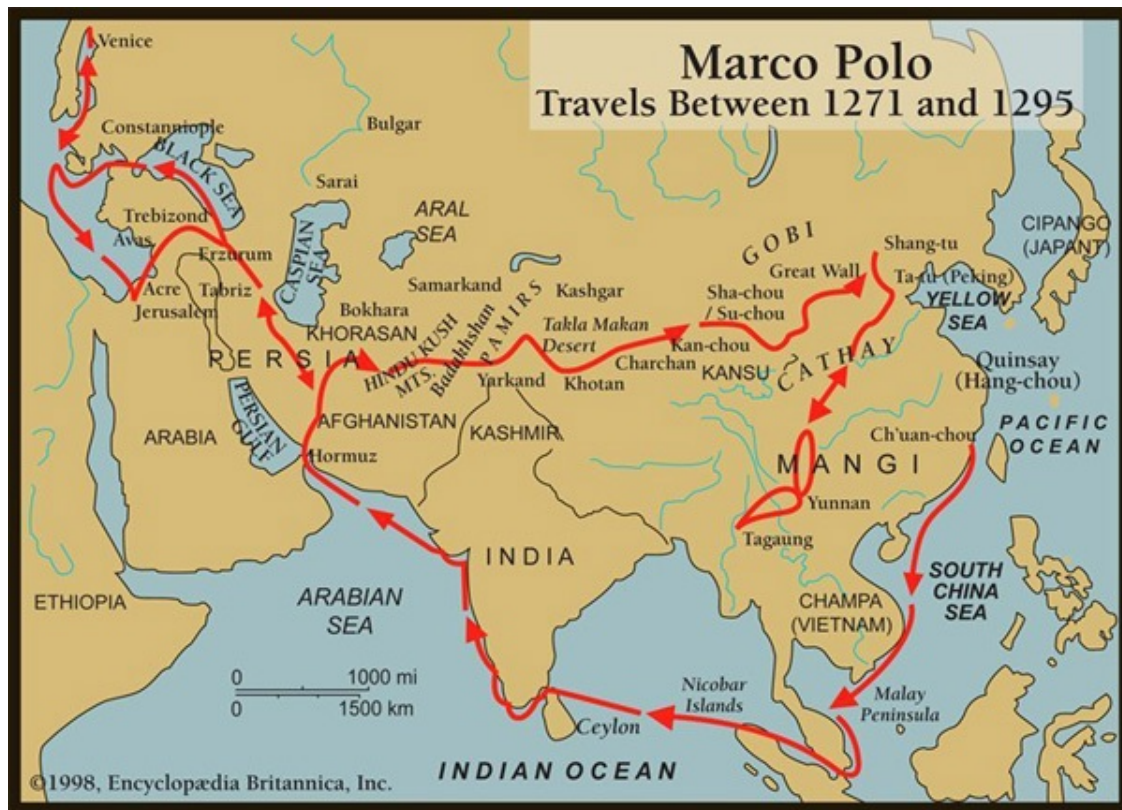
[CHAPTER 80](#)

[CHAPTER 81](#)

[CHAPTER 82](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Index](#)





# Prologue & Itinerary

*Marco Polo is perhaps the most well-known Western figure to travel into the mysterious and mystifying great East. Providing well-described tales of his journey, Polo's stories are likely to awaken the inner traveller in anyone who reads or hears of his saga. True or exaggerated, Polo's twenty-four-year voyage across land and sea exhibits his, at the time, unheard-of determination and influence. Even the Great Khan, conqueror and ruler of much of the Eastern land of the time, found a great confidant in Marco Polo and managed to keep him under his tutelage for seventeen years. Under the Great Khan, Polo was able to acquire power and prestige across the land, likely contributing to his immensely delayed return to Venice. Thus begins the tale of Marco Polo's travels...*

## PROLOGUE

Ye Emperors, Kings, Dukes, Marquises, Earls, and Knights, and all other people desirous of knowing the diversities of the races of mankind, as well as the diversities of kingdoms, provinces, and regions of all parts of the East, read through this book, and ye will find in it the greatest and most marvellous characteristics of the peoples, especially of Armenia, Persia, India, and Tartary, as they are severally related in the present work by Marco Polo, a wise and learned citizen of Venice, who states distinctly what things he saw and what things he heard from others.

For this book will be a truthful one. It must be known, then, that from the creation of Adam to the present day, no man, whether Pagan, or Saracen, or Christian, or other, of whatever progeny or generation he may have been, ever saw or inquired into so many and such great things as Marco Polo. Who, wishing in his secret thoughts that the things he had seen and heard should be made public by the present work, for the benefit of those who could not see them with their own eyes, he himself being in the year of our Lord 1295 in prison at Genoa, caused the things which are contained in the present work to be written by Master Rustigielo, a citizen of Pisa, who was with him in the same prison in Genoa; he divided it into three parts.

## ITINERARY

The elder Polos, when they left Constantinople in 1260, had not planned to go

far beyond the northern borders of the Euxine. They first landed at Soldaia, in Crimea, then an important trading city. From Soldaia they journeyed in a northerly and east-north-easterly direction to Sara (or Sarra), a vast city on the Volga, where King Cambuscan lived, and to Bolgara (or Bolghar) where they stayed for a year. Going south a short distance to Ucaca, another city on the Volga, they journeyed directly to the south-east, across the northern head of the Caspian, on the sixty days' march to Bokhara, where they stayed for three years.

From Bokhara they went with the Great Khan's people northward to Otrar, and thence in a north-easterly direction to the Court of the Khan near Pekin. On their return journey, they arrived at the sea-coast at Layas, in Armenia. From Layas they went to Acre, and from Acre to Negropont in Romania, and from Negropont to Venice, where they stayed for about two years.

On the second journey to the East, with the young Marco Polo, they sailed directly from Venice to Acre towards the end of 1271. They made a short journey southward to Jerusalem, for the holy oil, and then returned to Acre for letters from the Papal Legate.

Leaving Acre, they got as far as Layas, in Armenia, before they were recalled by the newly elected Pope. On setting out again, they returned to Layas, at that time a great city, where spices and cloth of gold were sold, and from which merchants journeying to the East generally started. From Layas they pushed northward into Turcomania, past Casaria and Sivas, to Arzingan, where the people wove "good buckrams".





**Petrus Vesconte**, Water Atlas of the Mediterranean, Genoa, 1313.

Fourth sheet: Eastern Mediterranean, coasts of Asia and Africa.

Coast of Morea, Rhodes, Crete, and the Nile Delta.

Six cards, illuminated manuscript on vellum, various scales,

48 x 40 cm each. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



**Petrus Vesconte**, Water Atlas of the Mediterranean,  
Genoa, 1313. Sixth sheet: Western Mediterranean.

Six cards, illuminated manuscript on vellum, various scales,  
48 x 40 cm each. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Passing Mount Ararat, where Noah's Ark was supposed to rest, they heard stories of the Baku oilfields. From here they went to the south-east, following the course of the Tigris to Bandas. From Bandas they seem to have made an unnecessary journey to the Persian Gulf. The book leads one to suppose that they travelled by way of Tauriz (in Persian Iraq), Yezd, and Kerman, to the port of Ormuz, as though they intended to take to sea there. They could, however, have progressed more swiftly had they followed the Tigris to Busrah and sailed upon the Gulf from there, by way of Keis or Kisi to Ormuz.

After visiting Ormuz, they returned to Kerman by another route, and then pushed on, over the horrible salt desert of Kerman, through Khorassan to Balakshan. It is possible that their journey was broken at Balakshan, owing to

the illness of Marco, who speaks of having at some time stayed nearly a year here to recover his health.

On leaving Balakshan they proceeded through the high Pamirs to Kash-gar, thence south-eastward by way of Khotan, not yet buried under the sands, to the Gobi desert. The Gobi desert, like all deserts, had a bad name as being “the abode of many evil spirits, which amuse travellers to their destruction”. The Polos crossed the Gobi in the usual thirty days, halting each night by the brackish ponds which make the passage possible.

After crossing the desert, they soon entered China. At Kan Chau, one of the first Chinese cities which they visited, they may have stayed for nearly a year, on account of “the state of their concerns”, but this stay probably took place later, when they were in Kublai’s service. They then crossed the province of Shen-si, into that of Shan-si, finally arriving at Kai-ping-fu, where Kublai had built his summer pleasure garden.

On the return journey, the Polos set sail from the port of Zaitum, in the province of Fo-Kien. They hugged the Chinese coast (in order to avoid the Pratas and Pracel Reefs) and crossed the Gulf of Tong King to Champa in the south-east of Cambodia. Leaving Champa, they may have made some stay at Borneo, but more probably they sailed direct to the island of Bintang, at the mouth of the Straits of Malacca, and to Sumatra, where the fleet was delayed for five months by the blowing of the contrary monsoon. The ships seem to have waited for the monsoon to change in a harbour on the north-east coast, in the Kingdom of Sumatra.

On getting a fair wind, they passed by the Nicobar and Andaman Islands, and then shaped a course for Ceylon. They put across to the coast of Coromandel, and may perhaps have coasted as far to the north upon the Madras coast as Masulipatam.

On the Bombay side, they would seem to have hugged the coast as far as they could, as far perhaps as Surat, in the Gulf of Cambay; but it is just possible that the descriptions of these places were taken from the tales of ship captains, and that this fleet put boldly out to avoid the coast pirates.

There is much reason to believe that, whilst employed in the service of the emperor, Marco Polo had visited some of the eastern islands, lying the nearest to the coast of China, such, perhaps, as the Philippines.

Marco Polo tells us much about Aden, and about towns on the Arabian coasts, but the fleet probably never reached them. All that is certainly known is that they arrived at Ormuz, in the Persian Gulf, and passed inland to Khorassan. On leaving Khorassan they journeyed overland, through Persia and Greater Armenia, until they came to Trebizond on the Euxine Sea.



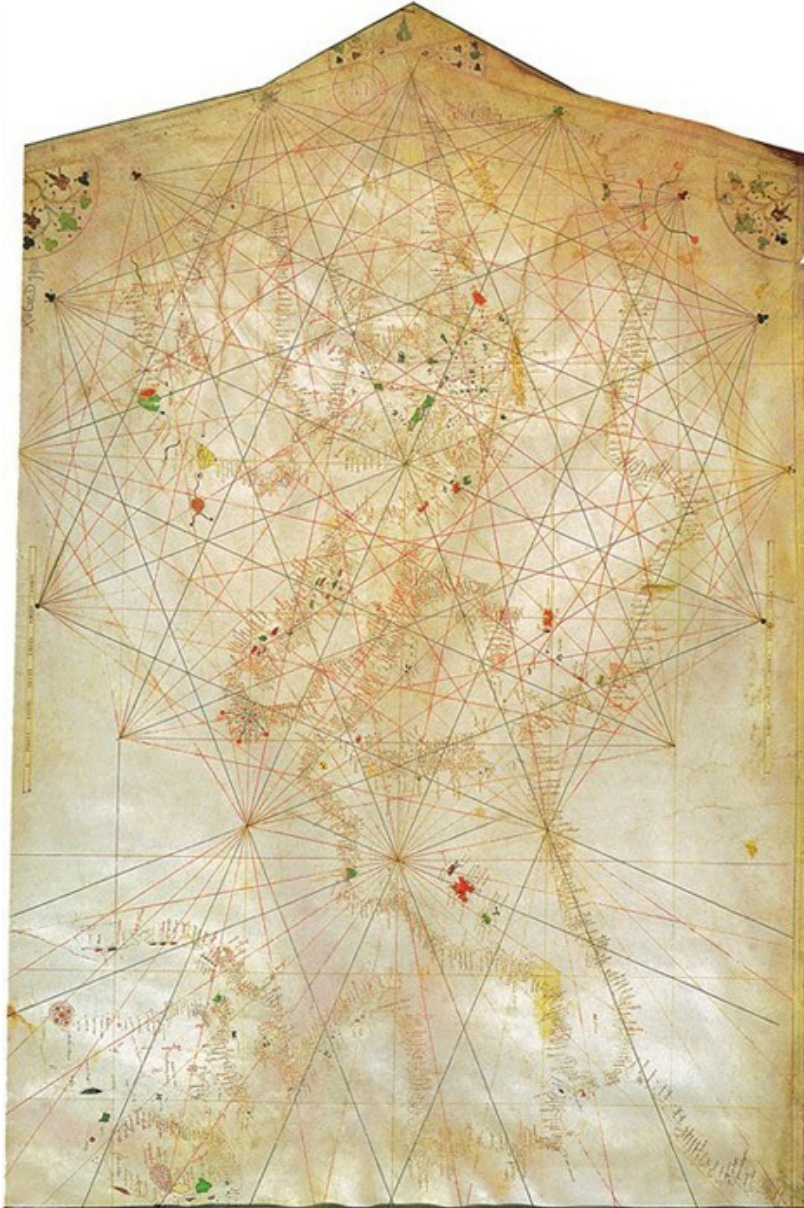
Their most direct route from Tabriz would have lain through Bedlis in Kurdistan to Aleppo, but at this time the sultans of Egypt, with whom the kings of Persia were continually at war, had possession of all the seaports of Syria, and would pay little respect to their passports.

By the way of Georgia to Trebizond, on the Euxine Sea, their land-journey was shorter and more secure, and when at that place they were under the protection of the Christian prince, whose family reigned in the small independent kingdom of Trebizond, from 1204 to 1462. Here they took a ship and sailed home to Venice, first stopping at Constantinople and at Negropont. “And this was in the year 1295 of Christ’s Incarnation”. J. M.



**Angelino Dulcert**, Map of the Mediterranean and Baltic, Mallorca, 1339. Chart of the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean east of the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea and the Red Sea.

Two vellum sheets assembled into a map, illuminated manuscript, 75 x 102 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



**Guillelmus Soleri**, Map of the Mediterranean and Atlantic (detail), Mallorca, 1380. Chart of the Eastern Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea and the Red Sea. Map, illuminated manuscript on vellum, 65 x 102 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.





**Albertinus Virga**, Map of the Mediterranean and Black Sea (detail), Venice, 1409. Chart of part of the North-East Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Black Sea, with estuaries. Map, illuminated manuscript on vellum, 43 x 68 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



*Marco Polo Leaves Venice on His Famous Journey  
to the Far East, in Roman d'Alexandre, c. 1400.  
Bodleian Library, Oxford.*

## Book I

### CHAPTER 1

§ 1. It should be known to the reader that, at the time when Baldwin II was emperor of Constantinople, where a magistrate representing the Doge of Venice then resided, and in the year of our Lord 1250, Nicolo Polo, the father of the said Marco, and Maffeo, the brother of Nicolo, respectable and well-informed men, embarked in a ship of their own, with a rich and varied cargo of merchandise, and reached Constantinople in safety. After mature deliberation on the subject of their proceedings, it was determined, as the measure most likely to improve their



trading capital, that they should continue their voyage into the Euxine (or Black Sea). With this view they made purchases of many fine and costly jewels, and taking their departure from Constantinople, navigated the Euxine to a port named Soldaia, from whence they travelled on horseback many days until they reached the court of a powerful chief of the Western Tartars, named Barka, who dwelt in the cities of Bolgara and Assara, and had the reputation of being one of the most liberal and civilised princes hitherto known amongst the tribes of Tartary. He expressed much satisfaction at the arrival of these travellers, and received them with marks of distinction. In return for which courtesy, when they had laid before him the jewels they brought with them, and perceived that their beauty pleased him, they presented them for his acceptance. The liberality of this conduct on the part of the two brothers struck him with admiration; and being unwilling that they should surpass him in generosity, he not only directed double the value of the jewels to be paid to them, but made them, in addition, several rich presents.

The brothers having resided a year in the dominions of this prince, became desirous of revisiting their native country, but were impeded by the sudden breaking out of a war between Barka and another chief, named Alau, who ruled over the Eastern Tartars. In a fierce and very sanguinary battle that ensued between their respective armies, Alau was victorious, in consequence of which, the roads being rendered unsafe for travellers, the brothers could not attempt to return the way they came. It was recommended to them, as the only practicable mode of reaching Constantinople, to proceed in an easterly direction, by an unfrequented route, so as to skirt the limits of Barka's territories. Accordingly they made their way to a town named Oukaka, situated on the confines of the kingdom of the Western Tartars. Leaving that place, and advancing still further, they crossed the Tigris, one of the four rivers of Paradise, and came to a desert, the extent of which was a seventeen-day journey, wherein they found neither town, castle, nor any substantial building, but only Tartars with their herds, dwelling in tents on the plain. Having passed this tract they arrived at a well-built city called Bokhara, in a province of that name, belonging to the dominions of Persia, and the noblest city of that kingdom, but governed by a prince whose name was Barak. Here, from inability to proceed further, they remained three years.

It happened while these brothers were in Bokhara, that a person of consequence and gifted with eminent talents emerged. He was proceeding as an ambassador sent by Alau (mentioned before) to the Grand Khan, supreme chief of all the Tartars, named Kublai, whose residence was at the extremity of the continent, in a direction between north-east and east. Not having ever before had

an opportunity, although he wished it, of seeing any natives of Italy, he was gratified in a high degree at meeting and conversing with these brothers, who had now become proficient in the Tartar language. After associating with them for several days, and finding their manners agreeable to him, he proposed that they should accompany him to the presence of the Great Khan, who would be pleased by their appearance at his court, which had not hitherto been visited by any person from their country, adding assurances that they would be honourably received and recompensed with many gifts. Convinced as they were that their endeavours to return homeward would expose them to the most imminent risks, they agreed to this proposal, and recommending themselves to the protection of the Almighty, they set out on their journey in the suite of the ambassador, attended by several Christian servants whom they had brought with them from Venice. Their first course was between the north-east and north, and an entire year was consumed before they were able to reach the imperial residence, in consequence of the extraordinary delays occasioned by the snows and the swelling of the rivers, which obliged them to halt until the former had melted and the floods had subsided. They observed many things worthy of admiration in the progress of their journey, but which are here omitted, as they will be described by Marco Polo, in the sequel of the book.

§ 2. Being introduced to the presence of the Grand Khan, Kublai, the travellers were received with the condescension and affability that belonged to his character, and as they were the first Latins to make an appearance in that country, they were entertained with feasts and honoured with other marks of distinction. Entering graciously into conversation with them, he made earnest inquiries on the subject of the western parts of the world, of the Emperor of the Romans, and of other Christian kings and princes. He wished to be informed of their relative consequence, the extent of their possessions, the manner in which justice was administered in their several kingdoms and principalities, how they conducted themselves in warfare, and above all he questioned them particularly respecting the Pope, the affairs of the Church, and the religious worship and doctrine of the Christians. Being well-instructed and discreet men, they gave appropriate answers upon all these points, and as they were perfectly acquainted with the Tartar (Moghul) language, they expressed themselves always in becoming terms; insomuch that the Grand Khan, holding them in high estimation, frequently commanded their attendance.

When he had obtained all the information that the two brothers communicated with so much good sense, he expressed himself well satisfied, and having formed in his mind the design of employing them as his ambassadors to the Pope, after consulting with his ministers on the subject, he proposed to them,



with many kind entreaties, that they should accompany one of his officers, named Khogatal, on a mission to the See of Rome. His object, he told them, was to make a request to His Holiness that he would send to him a hundred men of learning, thoroughly acquainted with the principles of the Christian religion, as well as with the seven arts, and qualified to prove to the learned of his dominions by just and fair argument, that the faith professed by Christians is superior to, and founded upon more evident truth than, any other, that the gods of the Tartars and the idols worshipped in their houses were only evil spirits, and that they and the people of the East in general were under an error in reverencing them as divinities. He moreover signified his pleasure that upon their return they should bring with them, from Jerusalem, some of the holy oil from the lamp which is kept burning over the sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he professed to hold in veneration and to consider as the true God. Having heard these commands addressed to them by the Grand Khan they humbly prostrated themselves before him, declaring their willingness and instant readiness to perform, to the utmost of their ability, whatever might be the royal will. Upon which he caused letters in the Tartarian language to be written in his name to the Pope of Rome, and these he delivered into their hands. He likewise gave orders that they should be furnished with a golden tablet displaying the imperial cipher, according to the usage established by His Majesty; in virtue of which the person bearing it, together with his whole suite, are safely conveyed and escorted from station to station by the governors of all places within the imperial dominions, and are entitled, during the time of their residing in any city, castle, town, or village, to a supply of provisions and everything necessary for their accommodation.



Childhood home of Marco Polo. Venice.



**Boucicaut Master**, *Marco Polo with Elephants and Camels Arriving at Hormuz on the Gulf of Persia from India* (detail), from the *Livre des Merveilles du Monde*, c. 1410-1412. Vellum, 42 x 29.8 cm.  
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.





*Sultan Sanjar Waylaid by the Old Woman  
Complaining of the Misconduct of His Troops,*  
from the book *Khamsa*, c. 1539-1543.  
British Library, London.

Being thus honourably commissioned they took their leave of the Grand Khan, and set out on their journey, but had not proceeded more than twenty days when the officer named Khogatal, their companion, fell dangerously ill, in the city named Alau. In this dilemma it was determined, upon consulting all who were present, and with the approbation of the man himself, that they should leave him behind. In the continuation of their journey they derived essential benefit from



being provided with the royal tablet, which procured them attention in every place through which they passed. Their expenses were defrayed, and escorts were furnished. But notwithstanding these advantages, so great were the natural difficulties they had to encounter, from the extreme cold, the snow, the ice, and the flooding of the rivers, that their progress was unavoidably tedious, and three years elapsed before they were enabled to reach a sea-port town in the Lesser Armenia, named Laiassus.

Departing from thence by sea, they arrived at Acre in the month of April, 1269, and there learned, with extreme concern, that Pope Clement IV was recently dead. A Legate whom he had appointed, named M. Tebaldo de' Visconti di Piacenza, was at this time resident in Acre, and to him they gave an account of what they had in command from the Grand Khan of Tartary. He advised them by all means to await the election of another Pope, and when that should take place, to proceed with the object of their embassy. Approving of this counsel, they determined upon employing the interval in a visit to their families in Venice. They accordingly embarked at Acre on a ship bound to Negropont, and from thence went on to Venice, where Nicolo Polo found that his wife, whom he had left with child at his departure, was dead, after having been delivered of a son, who received the name of Marco, and was now of the age of fifteen years. This is the Marco by whom the present work is composed, and who will give therein a relation of all those matters of which he has been an eyewitness.

§ 3. In the meantime, the election of a Pope was delayed by so many obstacles that they remained two years in Venice, continually expecting its accomplishment; when at length, becoming apprehensive that the Grand Khan might be displeased at their delay, or might suppose it was not their intention to revisit his country, they judged it expedient to return to Acre; on this occasion they took young Marco Polo with them. Under the sanction of the Legate they made a visit to Jerusalem, and there provided themselves with some of the oil belonging to the lamp of the Holy Sepulchre, conformably to the directions of the Grand Khan. As soon as they were furnished with his letters addressed to that prince bearing testimony to the fidelity with which they had endeavoured to execute his commission, and explaining to him that the Pope of the Christian church had not as yet been chosen, they proceeded to the before-mentioned port of Laiassus. Scarcely, however, had they taken their departure, when the Legate received messengers from Italy, dispatched by the College of Cardinals, announcing his own elevation to the papal chair; he thereupon assumed the name of Gregory X. Considering that he was now in a situation that enabled him to fully satisfy the wishes of the Tartar sovereign, he hastened to transmit letters to

the King of Armenia, communicating to him the event of his election, and requesting, in case the two ambassadors who were on their way to the court of the Grand Khan should not have already quitted his dominions, that he would give directions for their immediate return. These letters found them still in Armenia, and with great alacrity they obeyed the summons to repair once more to Acre, for which purpose the King furnished them with an armed galley, sending at the same time an ambassador from himself, to offer his congratulations to the sovereign Pontiff.

Upon their arrival, His Holiness received them in a distinguished manner, and immediately dispatched them with papal letters, accompanied by two friars of the order of Preachers, who happened to be on the spot; men of letters and of science, as well as profound theologians. One of them was named Fra Nicolo da Vicenza, and the other, Fra Guglielmo da Tripoli. To them he gave licence and authority to ordain priests, to consecrate bishops, and to grant absolution as fully as he could do in his own person. He also charged them with valuable presents, and among these, several handsome vases of crystal, to be delivered to the Grand Khan in his name, along with his benediction.

Having taken leave, they again steered their course to the port of Laiassus, where they landed, and from thence proceeded into the country of Armenia. Here they received intelligence that the Soldan of Babylonia, named Bundokdari, had invaded the Armenian territory with a numerous army, and had overrun and laid waste to the country to a great extent. Terrified at these accounts, and apprehensive for their lives, the two friars determined not to proceed further, and delivering over to the Venetians the letters and presents entrusted to them by the Pope, they placed themselves under the protection of the Master of the Knights Templar, and with him returned directly to the coast. Nicolo, Maffeo, and Marco, however, undismayed by perils or difficulties (to which they had long been inured), passed the borders of Armenia, and continued their journey. After crossing deserts of several days' march, and traversing many dangerous narrow passes, they advanced so far, in a direction between north-east and north that at length they gained information of the Grand Khan, who then had his residence in a large and magnificent city named Chemenfu. Their whole journey to this place occupied no less than three and a half years; but, during the winter months, their progress was inconsiderable. The Grand Khan having notice of their approach whilst still remote, and being aware how much they must have suffered from fatigue, sent forward to meet them at the distance of forty days' journey, and gave orders to prepare in every place through which they were to pass, whatever might be requisite to their comfort. By these means, and through the blessing of God, they were conveyed in safety to the royal court.

§ 4. Upon their arrival they were honourably and graciously received by the Grand Khan, in a full assembly of his principal officers. When they drew nigh to his person, they paid their respects by prostrating themselves on the floor. He immediately commanded them to rise, and to relate to him the circumstances of their travels, with all that had taken place in their negotiation with His Holiness the Pope. To their narrative, which they gave in the regular order of events, and delivered in perspicuous language, he listened with attentive silence. The letters and the presents from Pope Gregory were then laid before him, and, upon hearing the former read, he bestowed much commendation on the fidelity, the zeal, and the diligence of his ambassadors, and receiving with due reverence the oil from the Holy Sepulchre, he gave directions that it should be preserved with religious care. Upon his observing Marco Polo, and inquiring who he was, Nicolo made answer, "This is your servant, and my son"; upon which the Grand Khan replied, "He is welcome, and it pleases me much", and he caused him to be enrolled amongst his attendants of honour. And on account of their return he made a great feast and rejoicing and as long as the said brothers and Marco remained in the court of the Grand Khan, they were honoured even above his own courtiers. Marco was held in high estimation and respect by all belonging to the court. He learnt in a short time and adopted the manners of the Tartars, and acquired a proficiency in four different languages, which he became qualified to read and write. Finding him thus accomplished, his master was desirous of putting his talents for business to the test, and sent him on an important concern of state to a city named Karazan, situated at the distance of six months' journey from the imperial residence, on which occasion he conducted himself with so much wisdom and prudence in the management of the affairs entrusted to him, that his services became highly acceptable. On his part, perceiving that the Grand Khan took a pleasure in hearing accounts of whatever was new to him respecting the customs and manners of people, and the peculiar circumstances of distant countries, he endeavoured, wherever he went, to obtain correct information on these subjects, and made notes of all he saw and heard, in order to gratify the curiosity of his master. In short, during seventeen years that he continued in the Grand Khan's service, he rendered himself so useful that he was employed on confidential missions to every part of the empire and its dependencies; sometimes also he travelled on his own private account, but always with the consent, and sanctioned by the authority, of the Grand Khan. Under such circumstances it was that Marco Polo had the opportunity of acquiring a knowledge, either by his own observation, or what he collected from others, of so many things, until his time unknown, respecting the Eastern parts of the world, and which he diligently and regularly committed to writing, as in the



sequel will appear. And by this means he obtained so much honour that he provoked the jealousy of the other officers of the court.



Dome of the Treasury, Great Mosque  
of Damascus, 789. Damascus.



Dome of the Treasury, Great Mosque of Damascus (detail), 789. Damascus.





Dome of the Treasury, Great Mosque of Damascus (detail), 789. Damascus.



Courtyard of the Great Mosque  
of Damascus, 706-715. Damascus.

§ 5. Our Venetians, having now resided many years at the Imperial Court and in that time having realised considerable wealth in jewels of value and in gold, felt a strong desire to revisit their native country, and, however honoured and caressed by the sovereign, this sentiment was ever predominant in their minds. It became more decidedly their object when they reflected on the very advanced age of the Grand Khan, whose death, if it should happen prior to their departure, might deprive them of that public assistance by which alone they could expect to surmount the innumerable difficulties of so long a journey, and reach their

homes in safety; which on the contrary, in his lifetime, and through his favour, they might reasonably hope to accomplish. Nicolo Polo accordingly took an opportunity one day, when he observed him to be more cheerful than usual, of throwing himself at his feet and soliciting on behalf of himself and his family to be indulged with His Majesty's gracious permission for their departure. But far from showing himself disposed to comply with the request, he appeared hurt at the application and asked what motive they could have for wishing to expose themselves to all the inconveniences and hazards of a journey in which they might probably lose their lives. If gain, he said, was their object, he was ready to give them the double of whatever they possessed, and to gratify them with honours to the extent of their desires, but that, from the regard he bore to them, he must positively refuse their petition.

It happened, around this period, that a queen named Bolgana, the wife of Arghun, sovereign of India, died, and as her last request (which she likewise left in a testamentary writing) conjured her husband that no one might succeed to her place on his throne and in his affections who was not a descendant of her own family, now settled under the dominion of the Grand Khan, in the country of Cathay. Desirous of complying with this solemn entreaty, Arghun delegated three of his nobles, discreet men, whose names were Ulatai, Apusca, and Goza, attended by a numerous retinue, as his ambassadors to the Grand Khan, with a request that he might receive at his hands a maiden to wife, from among the relatives of his deceased queen. The application was taken in good part, and under the directions of His Majesty, choice was made of a damsel aged seventeen, extremely handsome and accomplished, whose name was Kogatin, and of whom the ambassadors, upon her being shown to them, highly approved. When everything was arranged for their departure, and a numerous suite of attendants appointed, to do honour to the future consort of King Arghun, they received from the Grand Khan a gracious dismissal, and set out on their return by the way they came. Having travelled for eight months, their further progress was obstructed and the roads shut against them, by fresh wars that had broken out amongst the Tartar princes. Much against their inclinations, therefore, they were constrained to adopt the measure of returning to the court of the Grand Khan, to whom they explained the interruption they had met with.

Around the time of their reappearance, Marco Polo happened to arrive from a voyage he had made, with a few vessels under his orders, to some parts of the East Indies, and reported to the Grand Khan the intelligence he brought in respect to the countries he had visited, with the circumstances of his own navigation, which, he said, was performed in those seas with the utmost safety. This latter observation having reached the ears of the three ambassadors, who



were extremely anxious to return to their own country, from whence they had now been absent three years, they presently sought a conference with our Venetians, whom they found equally desirous of revisiting their home. It was settled between them that the former, accompanied by their young queen, should obtain an audience of the Grand Khan, and represent to him with what convenience and security they might affect their return by sea, to the dominions of their master, whilst the voyage would be attended with less expense than the journey by land, and be performed in a shorter time, according to the experience of Marco Polo, who had lately sailed in those parts. Should his Majesty incline to give his consent to their adopting that mode of conveyance, they were then to urge him to suffer the three Europeans, as being persons well-skilled in the practice of navigation, to accompany them until they should reach the territory of King Arghun. The Grand Khan upon receiving this application showed by his countenance that it was exceedingly displeasing to him, averse as he was to parting with the Venetians. Feeling nevertheless that he could not with propriety do otherwise than consent, he yielded to their entreaty. Had it not been that he found himself constrained by the importance and urgency of this peculiar case, they would never otherwise have obtained permission to withdraw themselves from his service. He sent for them, however, and addressed them with much kindness and condescension, assuring them of his regard, and requiring from them a promise that when they should have resided some time in Europe and with their own family, they would return to him once more. With this object in view he caused them to be furnished with the golden tablet (or royal chop), which contained his order for their having free and safe conduct through every part of his dominions, with the needful supplies for themselves and their attendants. He likewise gave them authority to act in the capacity of his ambassadors to the Pope, the kings of France and Spain, and the other Christian princes.

At the same time preparations were made for the equipment of fourteen ships, each having four masts, and capable of being navigated with nine sails, the construction and rigging of which would admit of ample description; but, to avoid prolixity, it is for the present omitted. Among these vessels there were at least four or five that had crews of 250 or 260 men. On them were embarked the ambassadors, having the Queen under their protection, together with Nicolo, Maffeo, and Marco Polo, when they had first taken their leave of the Grand Khan, who presented them with many rubies and other handsome jewels of great value. He also gave directions that the ships should be furnished with stores and provisions for two years.

§ 6. After a navigation of about three months, they arrived at an island which



lay in a southerly direction, named Java, where they saw various objects worthy of attention, of which notice shall be taken in the sequel of the work. Taking their departure from thence, they employed eighteen months in the Indian seas before they were enabled to reach the place of their destination in the territory of King Arghun; during this part of their voyage also they had an opportunity of observing many things, which shall, in like-manner, be related hereafter. But here it may be proper to mention, that between the day of their sailing and that of their arrival, they lost by deaths, of the crews of the vessels and others who were embarked, about 600 persons; of the three ambassadors, only one, whose name was Goza, survived the voyage, whilst of all the ladies and female attendants only one died.

Upon landing they were informed that King Arghun had died some time before, and that the government of the country was then administered, on behalf of his son, who was still a youth, by a person of the name of Ki-akato. From him they desired to receive instructions as to the manner in which they were to dispose of the princess, whom, by the orders of the late King, they had conducted thither. His answer was that they ought to present the lady to Kasan, the son of Arghun, who was then at a place on the borders of Persia, which has its denomination from the Arbor Secco, where an army of 60,000 men was assembled for the purpose of guarding certain passes against the eruption of the enemy. This they proceeded to carry into execution, and having effected it, they returned to the residence of Ki-akato, because the road they were afterwards to take lay in that direction. Here, however, they reposed themselves for the space of nine months. When they took their leave he furnished them with four golden tablets, each of them a cubit in length, nearly thirteen centimetres wide, and weighing three or four marks of gold. Their inscription began with invoking the blessing of the Almighty upon the Grand Khan, that his name might be held in reverence for many years, and denouncing the punishment of death and confiscation of goods to all who should refuse obedience to the mandate. It then proceeded to direct that the three ambassadors, as his representatives, should be treated throughout his dominions with due honour, that their expenses should be defrayed, and that they should be provided with the necessary escorts. All this was fully complied with, and from many places they were protected by bodies of 200 horses; this could not have been dispensed with, as the government of Ki-akato was unpopular, and the people were disposed to commit insults and proceed to outrages, which they would not have dared to attempt under the rule of their proper sovereign. In the course of their journey, our travellers received intelligence of the Grand Khan (Kublai) having departed this life, which entirely put an end to all prospect of their revisiting those regions. Pursuing, therefore,

their intended route, they at length reached the city of Trebizond, from whence they proceeded to Constantinople, then to Negropont, and finally to Venice, at which place, in the enjoyment of health and abundant riches, they safely arrived in 1295. On this occasion they offered up their thanks to God, who had now been pleased to relieve them from such great fatigues, after having preserved them from innumerable perils. The foregoing narrative may be considered as a preliminary chapter, the object of which is to make the reader acquainted with the opportunities Marco Polo had of acquiring knowledge of the things he describes, during a residence of so many years in the Eastern parts of the world.

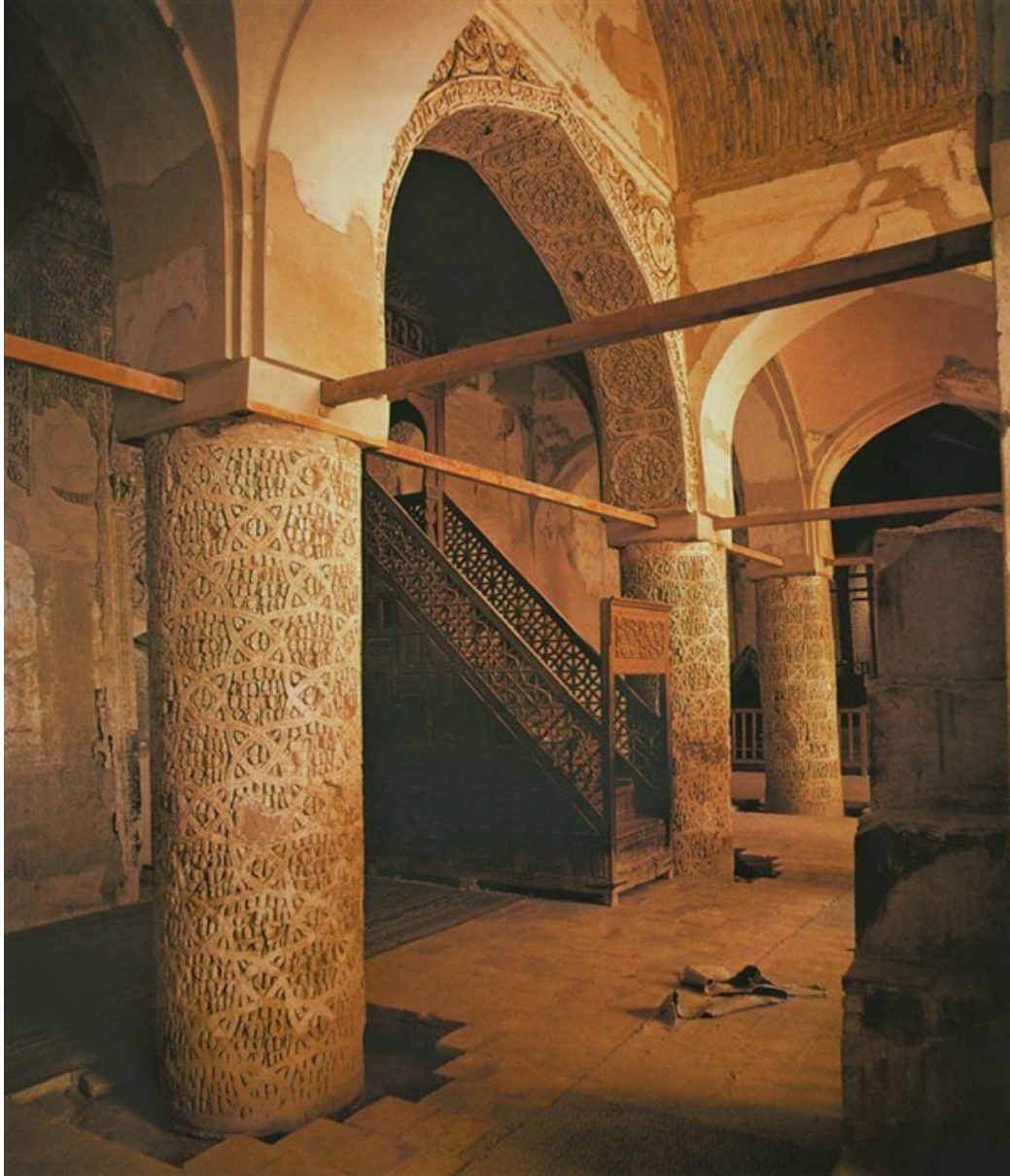


Dome of the Rock, c. 687-692.  
Porcelain and wood, 21 m. Jerusalem.



Interior view towards the courtyard,  
Ukhaydir Palace, second half  
of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Kufa (Iraq)





Interior view including minbar,  
Jameh Mosque of Nain,  
9<sup>th</sup> century. Nain (Iran).



Hall entrance to Khirbat al-Mafjar, first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Near Jericho (West Bank).

## CHAPTER 2

In commencing the description of the countries which Marco Polo visited in Asia, and of things worthy of notice which he observed therein, it is proper to mention that we are to distinguish two Armenias, the Lesser and the Greater. The King of the Lesser Armenia dwells in a city called Sebastoz, and rules his dominions with strict regard to justice. The towns, fortified places, and castles are numerous. There is abundance of all necessities of life, as well as of those

things which contribute to its comfort. Game, both of beasts and birds, is in plenty. It must be said, however, that the air of the country is not remarkably healthy. In former times its gentry were esteemed expert and brave soldiers; but at the present day they are great drinkers, cowardly, and worthless. On the sea-coast there is a city named Laiassus, a place of considerable traffic. Its port is frequented by merchants from Venice, Genoa, and many other places, who trade in spices and drugs of different sorts, manufactures of silk and wool, and other rich commodities. Those who design to travel into the interior of the Levant, usually proceed in the first instance to this port of Laiassus. The boundaries of the Lesser Armenia are, on the south, the Land of Promise, now occupied by the Saracens; on the north, Karamania, inhabited by Turkomans; towards the north-east lie the cities of Kaisariah, Sevasta, and many others subject to the Tartars; and on the western side it is bounded by the sea, which extends to the shores of Christendom.

### **CHAPTER 3**

The inhabitants of Turkomania may be distinguished into three classes. The Turkomans, who reverence Mahomet and follow his law, are a rude people who are dull of intellect. They dwell amongst the mountains and in places difficult to access, where their object is to find good pasture for their cattle, as they live entirely upon animal food. There is here an excellent breed of horses, which has the appellation of Turki, and fine mules which are sold at high prices. The other classes are Greeks and Armenians, who reside in the cities and fortified places, and gain their living by commerce and manufacture. The best and handsomest carpets in the world are wrought here, and also silks of crimson and other rich colours. Amongst its cities are those of Kogni, Kaisariah, and Sevasta, in which St Blaise obtained the glorious crown of martyrdom. They are all subject to the Great Khan, Emperor of the Oriental Tartars, who appoints governors to them.





Marshes of southern Iraq,  
heavily relied on for fishing and agricultural  
purposes throughout the Middle East.

## CHAPTER 4

Armenia Major is an extensive province, at the entrance of which is a city named Arzingan, where there is a manufacture of very fine cotton cloth called *bombasines*, as well as of many other curious fabrics, which it would be tedious to enumerate. It possesses the handsomest and most excellent baths of warm water, issuing from the earth, that are anywhere to be found. Its inhabitants are for the most part native Armenians, but under the dominion of the Tartars. In this province there are many cities, but Arzingan is the principal, and the seat of an archbishop; and the next in consequence are Argiron and Darziz. It is very extensive, and, in the summer season, the station of a part of the army of the Eastern Tartars, on account of the good pasture it affords for their cattle. However, as winter approaches they are obliged to change their quarters, the snowfall being so very deep that the horses cannot find subsistence, and for the sake of warmth and fodder they proceed south. Within a castle named Paipurth, which you meet with in going from Trebizond to Tauris, there is a rich mine of silver. In the central part of Armenia stands an exceedingly large and high mountain, upon which, it is said, the Ark of Noah rested, and for this reason it is termed the Mountain of the Ark. The circuit of its base cannot be compassed in



less than two days. The ascent is impracticable on account of the snow towards the summit, which never melts, but goes on increasing by each successive fall. In the lower region, however, near the plain, the melting of the snow fertilises the ground, and occasions such an abundant vegetation that all the cattle which collect there in summer from the neighbouring country meet with a never-failing supply. Bordering upon Armenia, to the south-west, are the districts of Mosul and Maredin, which shall be described hereafter, and many others too numerous to particularise. To the north lies Zorzania, near the confines of which there is a fountain of oil which discharges so great a quantity as to furnish loading for many camels. The use made of it is not for the purpose of food, but as an unguent for the cure of cutaneous distempers in men and cattle, as well as other complaints; it is also good for burning. In the neighbouring country no other is used in their lamps, and people come from distant parts to procure it.

## CHAPTER 5

In Zorzania the King is usually styled David Melik, which in our language signifies David the King. One part of the country is subject to the Tartars, and the other part, in consequence of the strength of its fortresses, has remained in the possession of its native princes. It is situated between two seas, of which that on the northern (western) side is called the Greater Sea (Euxine), and the other, on the eastern side, is called the Sea of Abakù (Caspian). This latter is in circuit 4,500 kilometres, and partakes of the nature of a lake, not communicating with any other sea. It has several islands, with handsome towns and castles, some of which are inhabited by people who fled before the Grand Tartar, when he laid waste to the kingdom or province of Persia, and took shelter in these islands or in the fastnesses of the mountains, where they hoped to find security. Some of the islands are uncultivated. This sea produces an abundance of fish, particularly sturgeon and salmon at the mouths of the rivers, as well as others of a large sort. The general wood of the country is the box-tree. I was told that in ancient times the kings of the country were born with the mark of an eagle on the right shoulder. The people are well made, bold sailors, expert archers, and fair combatants in battle. They are Christians, observing the ritual of the Greek Church, and wear their hair short, in the manner of the Western clergy.

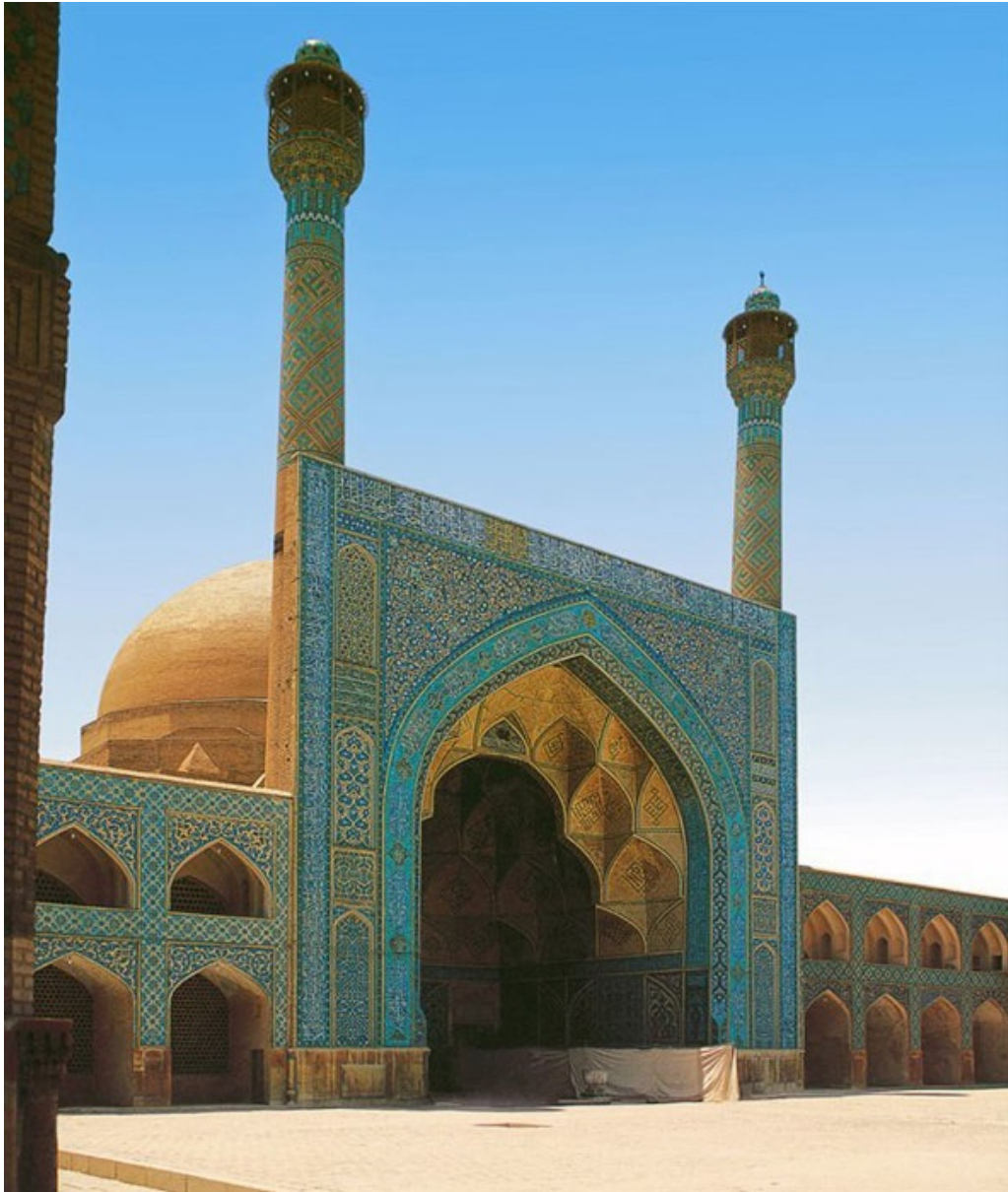
This is the province into which, when Alexander the Great attempted to advance northwards, he was unable to penetrate, by reason of the narrowness and difficulty of a certain pass, which on one side is washed by the sea, and is confined on the other by high mountains and woods, for the length of four miles, so that a very few men were capable of defending it against the whole world.

Disappointed in this attempt, Alexander caused a great wall to be constructed at the entrance of the pass, and fortified it with towers, in order to restrain those who dwelt beyond it from giving him trouble. From its uncommon strength the pass obtained the name of the Gate of Iron, and Alexander is commonly said to have enclosed the Tartars between two mountains.

It is not correct, however, to call the people Tartars, which in those days they were not, but of a race named Cumani, with a mixture of other nations. In this province there are many towns and castles; the necessities of life are in abundance; the country produces a great quantity of silk, and a manufacture is carried on of silk interwoven with gold. Here are found vultures of a large size, of a species named *avigi*. The inhabitants in general gain their livelihood by trade and manual labour. The mountainous nature of the country, with its strong narrow passes, has prevented the Tartars from effecting the entire conquest of it. At a convent of monks dedicated to St Lunardo, the following miraculous circumstances are said to take place. In a salt-water lake, four days' journey in circuit, upon the border of which the church is situated, the fish never make their appearance until the first day of Lent, and from that time to Easter-eve they are found in vast abundance; but on Easter-day they are no longer to be seen, nor during the remainder of the year. It is called the Lake of Geluchalat. The great rivers Herdil, Geihon, Kur, and Araz, with many others, flow into the before-mentioned sea of Abakù, which is encompassed with mountains. The Genoese merchants have recently begun to navigate it, and they bring from thence the kind of silk called *ghellie*. In this province there is a handsome city named Teflis, around which are suburbs and many fortified posts. It is inhabited by Armenian and Georgian Christians, as well as by some Mahometans and Jews; but these last are in no great numbers. Manufactures of silks and of many other articles are carried on there. Its inhabitants are subjects of the great King of the Tartars. Although we speak only of a few of the principal cities in each province, it is to be understood that there are many others, which it is unnecessary to particularise, unless they happened to contain something remarkable; but should the occasion present itself, these will be hereafter described.



Manar Jomban, 14<sup>th</sup> century. Isfahan (Iran).

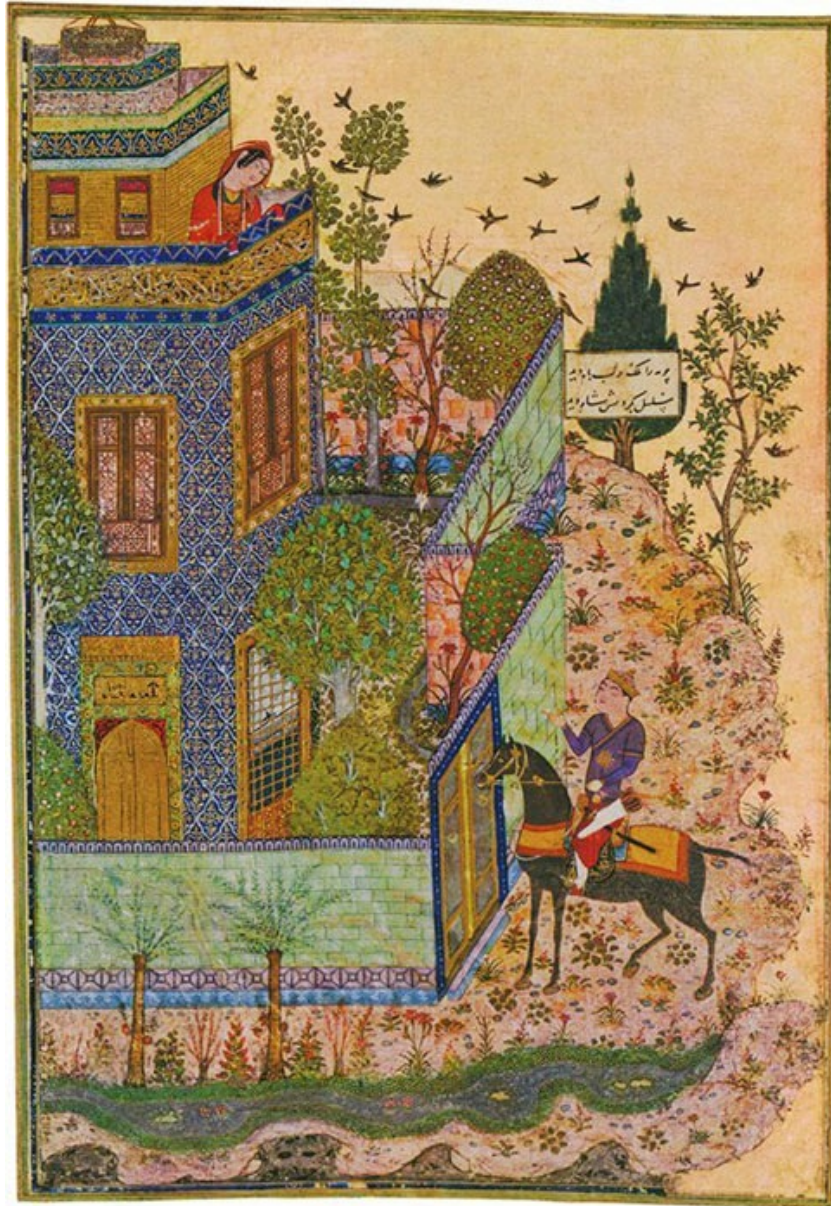


Jameh Mosque of Isfahan, also known  
as the Friday Mosque, 8<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century.  
Isfahan (Iran).





Portal and minarets, Jameh Mosque  
of Yazd. Yazd (Iran).



*Junayd, Prince Humay before Princess  
Humayun's Palace, 1396. Watercolour, ink,  
gold on paper, 32 x 19 cm. British Library, London.*

## CHAPTER 6

Baldach is a large city; heretofore the residence of the Khalif or Pontiff of all the Saracens, as the Pope is of all Christians.

A great river flows through the midst of it, by means of which the merchants transport their goods to and from the Sea of India, the distance being computed at seventeen days' navigation, in consequence of the windings of its course.

Those who undertake the voyage, after leaving the river, touch at a place named Kisi, from whence they proceed to sea: but previously to their reaching this anchorage they pass a city named Balsara, in the vicinity of which are groves of palm trees producing the best dates in the world. In Baldach there is a manufacture of silks wrought with gold, and also of damasks, as well as of velvets ornamented with the figures of birds and beasts. Almost all the pearls brought to Europe from India have undergone the boring process at this place. The Mahometan law is here regularly studied, as are also magic, physics, astronomy, geomancy, and physiognomy. It is the noblest and most extensive city to be found in this part of the world.

## CHAPTER 7

The above-mentioned Khalif, who is understood to have amassed greater treasures than had ever been possessed by any other sovereign, perished miserably under the following circumstances. At the period when the Tartar princes began to extend their dominion, there were amongst them four brothers, of whom the eldest, named Mangu, reigned in the royal seat of the family. Having subdued the country of Cathay, and other districts in that quarter, they were not satisfied, but coveting further territory, they conceived the idea of universal Empire, and proposed that they should divide the world amongst them. With this object in view, it was agreed that one of them should proceed to the east, that another should make conquests in the south, and that the other two should direct their operations against the remaining quarters. The southern portion fell to the lot of Hulagu, who assembled a vast army, and having subdued the provinces through which his route lay, proceeded in 1255 to attack this city of Baldach. Being aware, however, of its great strength and the prodigious number of its inhabitants, he trusted rather to strategy than to force for its reduction, and in order to deceive the enemy with regard to the number of his troops, which consisted of 100,000 horses, besides foot soldiers, he posted one division of his army on the one side, another division on the other side of the approach to the city, in such a manner as to be concealed by a wood, and placing himself at the head of the third, advanced boldly to within a short distance of the gate. The Khalif made light of a force apparently so inconsiderable and confident in the efficacy of the usual Mahometan ejaculation, thought of nothing less than its entire destruction, and for that purpose marched out of the city with his guards; but as soon as Hulagu perceived his approach, he feigned to retreat before him, until by this means he had drawn him beyond the wood where the other divisions were posted. By the closing of these from both sides, the army of

the Khalif was surrounded and broken, he was made a prisoner himself, and the city surrendered to the conqueror. Upon entering it, Hulagu discovered, to his great astonishment, a tower filled with gold. He called the Khalif before him, and after reproaching him with his avarice, that prevented him from employing his treasures in the formation of an army for the defense of his capital against the powerful invasion with which it had long been threatened, gave orders for his being locked in this same tower, without sustenance; and there, in the midst of his wealth, he soon finished with a miserable existence.

I judge that our Lord Jesus Christ herein thought proper to avenge the wrongs of his faithful Christians, so abhorred by this Khalif. From the time of his accession in 1225, his daily thoughts were employed on the means of converting to his religion those who resided within his dominions, or, upon their refusal, in forming pretences for putting them to death. Consulting with his learned men for this purpose, they discovered a passage in the Gospel where it is said: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain: Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove," (upon prayer to that effect addressed to the Divine Majesty); and being rejoiced at the discovery, persuaded as he was that the thing was utterly impossible, he gave orders for assembling all the Nestorian and Jacobite Christians who dwelt in Baghdad, and who were very numerous. To these the question was propounded, whether they believed all that is asserted in the text of their Gospel to be true, or not. They made answer that it was true. To which the Khalif answered:

"Then, if it be true, let us see which of you will give the proof of his faith; for certainly if there is not to be found one amongst you who possesses even so small a portion of faith in his Lord, as to be equal to a grain of mustard, I shall be justified in regarding you, henceforth, as a wicked, reprobate, and faithless people. I allow you therefore ten days, before the expiration of which you must either, through the power of Him whom you worship, remove the mountain now before you, or embrace the law of our prophet, in either of which cases you will be safe, but otherwise you must all expect to suffer the most cruel deaths."

The Christians, acquainted as they were with his merciless disposition, as well as his eagerness to despoil them of their property, upon hearing these words, trembled for their lives; but nevertheless, having confidence in their Redeemer, that He would deliver them from their peril, they held an assembly and deliberated on the course they ought to take. None other presented itself than that of imploring the Divine Being to grant them the aid of His mercy. To obtain this, every individual, great and small, prostrated himself night and day, upon the earth, shedding tears profusely, and attending to no other occupation than that of prayer to the Lord. When they had thus persevered during eight days, a divine



revelation came at length, in a dream, to a bishop of exemplary life, directing him to proceed in search of a certain shoemaker (whose name is not known) having only one eye, whom he should summon to the mountain, as a person capable of effecting its removal, through the Divine Grace. Having found the shoemaker and made him acquainted with the revelation, he replied that he did not feel himself worthy of the undertaking, his merits not being such as to entitle him to the reward of such abundant grace. Importuned, however, by the poor terrified Christians, he at length assented. It should be understood that he was a man of strict morals and pious conversation, having his mind pure and faithful to his God, regularly attending the celebration of the mass and other divine offices, fervent in works of charity, and rigid in the observance of fasts. It once happened to him that a handsome young woman who came to his shop in order to be fitted with a pair of slippers, in presenting her foot accidentally exposed a part of her leg, the beauty of which excited in him a momentary strong desire; but recollecting himself, he presently dismissed her, and calling to mind the words of the Gospel, where it is said, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell-fire", he immediately, with an instrument of his trade, scooped out his right eye, evincing by that act, beyond all doubt, the excellence of his faith.

The appointed day being arrived, divine service was performed at an early hour, and a solemn procession was made to the plain where the mountain stood, the holy cross being borne in front. The Khalif likewise, in the conviction of its proving a vain ceremony on the part of the Christians, chose to be present, accompanied by a number of his guards, for the purposing of destroying them in the event of failure. Here the pious artisan, kneeling before the cross, and lifting up his hands to heaven, humbly besought his Creator that He would compassionately look down upon earth, and for the glory and excellence of His name, as well as for the support and confirmation of the Christian faith, would lend assistance to His people in the accomplishment of the task imposed upon them, and thus manifest his power to the revilers of His law. Having concluded his prayer, he cried with a loud voice: "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I command thee, O mountain, to remove thyself!" Upon these words being uttered, the mountain moved, and the earth at the same time trembled in a wonderful and alarming manner. The Khalif and all those by whom he was surrounded, were struck with terror, and remained in a state of stupefaction. Many of the latter became Christians, and even the Khalif secretly embraced Christianity, always wearing a cross concealed under his garment, which after his death was found upon him; on this account it was that they did not entomb

him in the shrine of his predecessors. In commemoration of this singular grace bestowed upon them by God, all the Christians, Nestorians, and Jacobites from that time forth have continued to celebrate in a solemn manner the return of the day on which the miracle took place, keeping a fast also on the vigil.



Folio from a *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*) by Ferdowsi;  
 verso: *The Enthronement of Shah Zav*; recto: unrelated text,  
 c. 1330-1340. Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper,  
 59.1 x 40.0 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,  
 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



**Master Mîrak and his disciple Bihzâd,**  
*Mystical Tipsiness in the Garden of*  
*Sultan Husayn Mîrzâ Bayqarâ, 1488-1489.*  
 Frontispiece for *Bûstân* (Orchard) by the poet  
 Sa'dî. National Egyptian Library, Cairo.





**Master Mîrak and his disciple Bihzâd,**  
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*Portrait of a Painter*, late 15<sup>th</sup> century.  
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper,  
18.9 x 12.8 cm. Freer Gallery of Art,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

## CHAPTER 8

Persia was anciently a large and noble province, but it is now a great part destroyed by the Tartars. In Persia there is a city which is called Saba, from whence were the three Magi who came to adore Christ in Bethlehem; the three are buried in that city in a fair sepulchre, and they are all three entire with their

beards and hair. One was called Balthasar, the second Gaspar, and the third Melchior. Marco inquired often in that city concerning the three Magi, and nobody could tell him anything about them, except that the three Magi were buried there in ancient times. After three days' journey you come to a castle which is called Palasata, which means the castle of the fire-worshippers; and it is true that the inhabitants of that castle worship fire, and this is given as the reason: The men of that castle say, that anciently three kings of that country went to adore a certain king who was newly born, and carried with them three offerings, namely, gold, frankincense, and myrrh: gold, that they might know if he were an earthly king; frankincense, that they might know if he were God; and myrrh, that they might know if he were a mortal man. When these Magi were presented to Christ, the youngest of the three adored him first, and it appeared to him that Christ was of his stature and age. The middle one came next, and then the eldest, and to each he seemed to be of their own stature and age. Having compared their observations together, they agreed to go all to worship at once, and then he appeared to them all of his true age. When they went away, the infant gave them a closed box, which they carried with them for several days, and then becoming curious to see what he had given them, they opened the box and found in it a stone, which was intended for a sign that they should remain as firm as a stone in the faith they had received from him. When, however, they saw the stone, they marvelled, and thinking themselves deluded, they threw the stone into a certain pit, and instantly fire burst forth in the pit. When they saw this, they repented bitterly of what they had done, and taking some of the fire with them they carried it home. And having placed it in one of their churches, they keep it continually burning, and adore that fire as a god, and make all their sacrifices with it, and if it happen to be extinguished, they go for more to the original fire in the pit where they threw the stone, which is never extinguished, and they take of no other fire. And therefore the people of that country worship fire. Marco was told all of this by the people of the country, and it is true that one of those kings was of Saba, and the second was of Dyava, and the third was of the castle.

## CHAPTER 9

In Persia, which is a large province, there are eight kingdoms, the names of which are as follows: The first which you meet with upon entering the country is Kasibin; the second, lying towards the south (west), is Kurdistan; the third is Lor; towards the north, the fourth is Suolistan; the fifth, Spaan; the sixth, Siras; the seventh, Soncara; the eighth, Timocain, which is at the extremity of Persia.

All these kingdoms lie to the south, excepting Timocain, and this is to the north, near the place called Arbor Secco. The country is distinguished for its excellent breed of horses, many of which are carried for sale to India, and bring high prices, not less in general than 200 *livres tournois*. It produces also the largest and handsomest breed of asses in the world, which sell (on the spot) at higher prices than the horses, because they are more easily fed, are capable of carrying heavier burdens, and travel further in the day than either horses or mules, which cannot support an equal degree of fatigue. The merchants, therefore, who in travelling from one province to another are obliged to pass extensive deserts and tracts of sand, where no kind of herbage is to be met with, and where, on account of the distance between the wells or other watering places, it is necessary to make long journeys in the course of the day, are desirous of providing themselves with asses in preference, as they get sooner over the ground and require a smaller allowance of food. Camels also are employed here, and these in like manner carry great weights and are maintained at little cost, but they are not as swift as the asses. The traders of these parts convey the horses to Kisi, to Ormus, and to other places on the coast of the Indian Sea, where they are purchased by those who carry them to India. In consequence, however, of the greater heat of that country, they do not last many years, being natives of a temperate climate.

In some of these districts, the people are savage and bloodthirsty, making a common practice of wounding and murdering each other. They would not refrain from doing injury to the merchants and travellers, were they not in terror of the Eastern Tartars, who cause them to be severely punished. A regulation is also established, that in all roads where danger is apprehended, the inhabitants shall be obliged, upon the requisition of the merchants, to provide active and trusty conductors for their guidance and security between one district and another; who are to be paid at the rate of two or three groats for each loaded beast, according to the distance. They are all followers of the Mahometan religion. In the cities, however, there are merchants and numerous artisans, who manufacture a variety of stuffs of silk and gold. Cotton grows abundantly in this country, as do wheat, barley, millet, and several other sorts of grain, together with grapes and every species of fruit. Should anyone assert that the Saracens do not drink wine, being forbidden by their law, it may be answered that they quiet their consciences on this point by persuading themselves that if they take the precaution of boiling it over the fire, by which it is partly consumed and becomes sweet, they may drink it without infringing the commandment; for having changed its taste, they change its name, and no longer call it wine, although it is such in fact.





Bowl, Iran, late 12<sup>th</sup> - early 13<sup>th</sup> century.  
Bronze. Khalili Collections.





Tray, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century. Bronze, embossed and tooled with punches, diameter: 73.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.



Tray, 10<sup>th</sup> century.  
Bronze, embossed, diameter: 58 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.





Tile, Herat (Afghanistan),  
early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Ceramic.  
Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran.

## CHAPTER 10

In a southern direction there is a town named Kamandu, formerly a very large place and of much consequence, but not so at this day, having been repeatedly laid waste by the Tartars. The neighbouring district is called Reobarle. The temperature of the plain is very warm. It produces wheat, rice, and other grains. On that part of it which lies nearest to the hills, dates, pomegranates, quinces,



and a variety of brother fruits grow, amongst which one is called Adam's apple, not known in our cool climate. Turtle-doves are found here in vast numbers, occasioned by the plentiful small fruits which supply them with food, and they are not eaten by the Mahometans, who hold them in abomination. There are likewise many pheasants and francolins, the latter of which do not resemble those of other countries, their colour being a mixture of white and black with red legs and beak. Among the cattle also there are some of an uncommon kind, particularly a species of large white oxen, with short, smooth coats (the effect of a hot climate), horns short, thick, and obtuse, and having between the shoulders a gibbous rising or hump, about the height of two palms. They are beautiful animals, and, being very strong, are made to carry great weights. Whilst loading, they are accustomed to kneel down like the camel, and then to rise up with the burden. We find here also sheep that are equal to the ass in size, with long and thick tails, weighing thirty pounds and upwards, which are fat and excellent to eat. In this province there are many towns encompassed with lofty and thick walls of earth, for the purpose of defending the inhabitants against the incursions of the Karaunas, who scour the country and plunder everything within their reach.

In order that the reader may understand what people these are, it is necessary to mention that there was a prince named Nugodar, the nephew of Zagataï, who was brother of the Grand Khan (Oktaï), and reigned in Turkestan. This Nugodar, whilst living at Zagataï's court, became ambitious of being himself a sovereign, and having heard that in India there was a province called Malabar, governed at that time by a king named As-idin Sultan, which had not yet been brought under the dominion of the Tartars, he secretly collected a body of about 10,000 men, the most profligate and desperate he could find, and separating himself from his uncle without giving him any intimation of his designs, proceeded through Balashan to the kingdom of Kesmur, where he lost many of his people and cattle, from the difficulty and badness of the roads, and at length entered the province of Malabar. Coming thus upon As-idin by surprise, he took from him by force a city called Dely, as well as many others in its vicinity, and there began to reign. The Tartars whom he carried thither, and who were men of a light complexion, mixing with the dark Indian women, produced the race to whom the appellation of Karaunas is given, signifying, in the language of the country, a mixed breed; these are the people who have since been in the practice of committing depredations, not only in the country of Reobarle, but in every other to which they have access. In India they acquired the knowledge of magical and diabolical arts, by means of which they are enabled to produce darkness, obscuring the light of day to such a degree, that persons are invisible to each

other, unless within a very small distance. Whenever they go on their predatory excursions, they put this art in practice, and their approach is consequently not perceived. Most frequently this district is the scene of their operations, because when the merchants from various parts assemble at Ormus, and wait for those who are on their way from India, they send, in the winter season, their horses and mules, which are out of condition from the length of their journey, to the plain of Reobarle, where they find abundance of pasture and become fat. The Karaunas, aware that this will take place, seize the opportunity of effecting a general pillage, and make slaves of the people who attend the cattle, if they have not the means of ransom. Marco Polo himself was once enveloped in a factitious obscurity of this kind, but escaped from it to the castle of Konsalmi. Many of his companions, however, were taken and sold, and others were put to death. These people have a king named Corobar.

## **CHAPTER 11**

At the extremity of the plain before mentioned as extending in a southern direction to the distance of five days' journey, there is a descent for about twenty miles, by a road that is extremely dangerous, from the multitude of robbers, by whom travellers are continually assaulted and plundered. This slope conducts you to another plain, called the plain of Ormus; it is very beautiful in its appearance, two days' journey in extent. Here you cross a number of fine streams, and see a country covered with date-palms, amongst which are found the francoline partridge, birds of the parrot kind, and a variety of others unknown to our climate. At length you reach the border of the ocean, where, upon an island, at no great distance from the shore, stands a city named Ormus, whose port is frequented by traders from all parts of India, who bring spices and drugs, precious stones, pearls, gold tissues, elephants' teeth, and various other articles of merchandise. These they dispose of to a different set of traders, by whom they are dispersed throughout the world. This city, indeed, is eminently commercial, has towns and castles dependent upon it, and is esteemed the principal place in the kingdom of Kierman. Its ruler is named Rukmedin Achomak, who governs with absolute authority, but at the same time acknowledges the King of Kierman as his liege lord. When any foreign merchant happens to die within his jurisdiction, he confiscates the property, and deposits the amount in his treasury. During the summer season, the inhabitants do not remain in the city, on account of the excessive heat, which renders the air unwholesome, but retire to their gardens along the shore or on the banks of the river, where with a kind of ozier-work they construct huts over the water. These

they enclose with stakes, driven in the water on the one side, and on the other upon the shore, making a covering of leaves to shelter them from the sun. Here they reside during the period in which there blows, every day, from about the hour of nine until noon, a land-wind so intensely hot as to impede respiration, and to occasion death by suffocating the person exposed to it. None can escape from its effects that are overtaken by it on the sandy plain. As soon as the approach of this wind is perceived by the inhabitants, they submerge themselves to the chin in water, and continue in that situation until it ceases to blow. In proof of the extraordinary degree of this heat, Marco Polo says that he happened to be in these parts when the following circumstance occurred. The ruler of Ormus having neglected to pay his tribute to the King of Kierman, the latter took the resolution of enforcing it at the season when the principal inhabitants reside out of the city, upon the main land, and for this purpose dispatched a body of troops, consisting of 1,600 horses and 5,000 foot soldiers, through the country of Reobarle, in order to seize them by surprise. In consequence, however, of their being misled by the guides, they failed to arrive at the place intended before the approach of night, and halted to take repose in a grove not far distant from Ormus; but upon recommencing their march in the morning, they were assailed by this hot wind, and were all suffocated, not one escaping to carry the fatal intelligence to his master. When the people of Ormus became acquainted with the event, and proceeded to bury the carcasses, in order that their stench might not infect the air, they found them so baked by the intenseness of the heat, that the limbs, upon being handled, separated from the trunks, and it became necessary to dig the graves close to the spot where the bodies lay.

## CHAPTER 12

Upon leaving Kierman and travelling three days, you reach the borders of a desert extending to the distance of seven days' journey, at the end of which you arrive at Kobiam. During the first three days (of these seven) but little water is to be met with, and that little is impregnated with salt, green as grass, and so nauseous that none can use it as drink. Should even a drop of it be swallowed, frequent calls of nature will be occasioned, and the effect is the same from eating a grain of the salt made from this water. In consequence of this, persons who travel over the desert are obliged to carry a provision of water along with them. The cattle, however, are compelled by thirst to drink such as they find, and a flux immediately ensues. In the course of these three days not one habitation is to be seen. The whole is arid and desolate. Cattle are not found there, because there is no subsistence for them. On the fourth day you come to a river of fresh water,

but which has its channel for the most part underground. In some parts, however, there are abrupt openings caused by the force of the current, through which the stream becomes visible for a short space and water is to be had in abundance. Here the wearied traveller stops to refresh himself and his cattle after the fatigues of the preceding journey. The circumstances of the latter three days resemble those of the former, and conduct him at length to the town of Kobiam.

Kobiam is a large town, the inhabitants of which observe the law of Mahomet. They have plenty of iron, accarum, and andanicum. Here they make mirrors of highly polished steel, of a large size and very handsome. Much antimony or zinc is found in the country, and they procure tutty which makes an excellent collyrium, together with spodium, by the following process. They take the crude ore from a vein that is known to yield such as is fit for the purpose, and put it into a heated furnace. Over the furnace they place an iron grating formed of small bars set close together. The smoke or vapour ascending from the ore in burning attaches itself to the bars, and as it cools becomes hard. This is the tutty, whilst the gross and heavy part, which does not ascend, but remains as a cinder in the furnace, becomes the spodium.





Seal, 6<sup>th</sup> - early 7<sup>th</sup> century.  
Carved chalcedony, 1.9 x 2.1 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg.



Jug with the face of a goddess, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century.  
Silver, moulded from a sheet, embossed, chased,  
punched, and gilded (the neck produced separately,  
the join masked by a tooled relief rim, handle missing),  
height: 14.5 cm; weight: 358.3 g. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.



Vase, 9<sup>th</sup> century. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

## CHAPTER 13

Having spoken of this country, mention shall now be made of the Old Man of the Mountain. The district in which his residence lay obtained the name of Mulehet, signifying in the language of the Saracens, the place of heretics, and his people that of Mulehetites, or holders of heretical tenets; as we apply the term of Patharini to certain heretics amongst Christians. The following account of this chief, Marco Polo testifies to having heard from sundry persons. He was named Alo-eddin, and his religion was that of Mahomet. In a beautiful valley enclosed



between two lofty mountains, he had formed a luxurious garden, stored with every delicious fruit and every fragrant shrub that could be procured. Palaces of various sizes and forms were erected in different parts of the grounds, ornamented with works in gold, with paintings, and with furniture of rich silks. By means of small conduits contrived in these buildings, streams of wine, milk, honey, and some of pure water, were seen to flow in every direction. The inhabitants of these palaces were elegant and beautiful damsels, accomplished in the arts of singing, playing upon all sorts of musical instruments, dancing, and especially those of dalliance and amorous allurements. Clothed in rich dresses, they were seen continually sporting and amusing themselves in the garden and pavilions, their female guardians being confined within doors and never suffered to appear. The object which the chief had in view in forming a garden of this fascinating kind, was this: that Mahomet having promised to those who should obey his will the enjoyments of Paradise, where every species of sensual gratification should be found, in the society of beautiful nymphs, he was desirous of its being understood by his followers that he also was a prophet and the equal of Mahomet, and had the power of admitting to Paradise such as he should choose to favour. In order that none without his licence might find their way into this delicious valley, he caused a strong and impregnable castle to be erected at the opening of it, through which the entry was by a secret passage. At his court, likewise, this chief entertained a number of youths, from the ages of twelve to twenty years, selected from the inhabitants of the surrounding mountains, who showed a disposition for martial exercises, and appeared to possess the quality of daring courage. To them he was in the daily practice of discoursing on the subject of the paradise announced by the Prophet, and of his own power of granting admission; at certain times he caused opium to be administered to ten or a dozen of the youths, and when half-dead with sleep he had them conveyed to the several apartments of the palaces in the garden. Upon awakening from the state of lethargy, their senses were struck with all the delightful objects that have been described, and each perceived himself surrounded by lovely damsels, singing, playing, and attracting his regards by the most fascinating caresses, serving him also with delicate viands and exquisite wines; until intoxicated with excess of enjoyment amidst actual rivulets of milk and wine, he believed himself assuredly in Paradise, and felt an unwillingness to relinquish its delights.

When four or five days had thus been passed, they were thrown once more into a state of somnolence, and carried out of the garden. Upon their being introduced to his presence, and questioned by him as to where they had been, their answer was: "In Paradise, through the favour of Your Highness," and then



before the whole court, who listened to them with eager curiosity and astonishment, they gave a circumstantial account of the scenes to which they had been witnesses. The chief thereupon addressing them, said: "We have the assurances of our Prophet that he who defends his lord shall inherit Paradise, and if you show yourselves devoted to the obedience of my orders, that happy lot awaits you". Animated to enthusiasm by words of this nature, all deemed themselves happy to receive the commands of their master, and went forward to die in his service. The consequence of this system was, that when any of the neighbouring princes, or others, gave offence to this chief, they were put to death by these his disciplined assassins; none of whom felt terror at the risk of losing their own lives, which they held in little estimation, provided they could execute their master's will. On this account his tyranny became the subject of dread in all the surrounding countries. He had also constituted two deputies or representatives of himself, of whom one had his residence in the vicinity of Damascus, and the other in Kurdistan, and these pursued the plan he had established for training their young dependants. Thus there was no person, however powerful, who, having become exposed to the enmity of the Old Man of the Mountain, could escape assassination. His territory being situated within the dominions of Hulagu, the brother of the Grand Khan (Mangu), that prince had information of his atrocious practices, as above related, as well as of his employing people to rob travellers in their passage through his country, and in 1262 sent one of his armies to besiege this chief in his castle. It proved, however, so capable of defence, that for three years no impression could be made upon it; until at length he was forced to surrender from the want of provisions and, being made prisoner, was put to death. His castle was dismantled, and his garden of Paradise destroyed. And from that time there has been no Old Man of the Mountain.



Ewer, Herat (Afghanistan),  
c. 1200. Copper.  
British Museum, London.



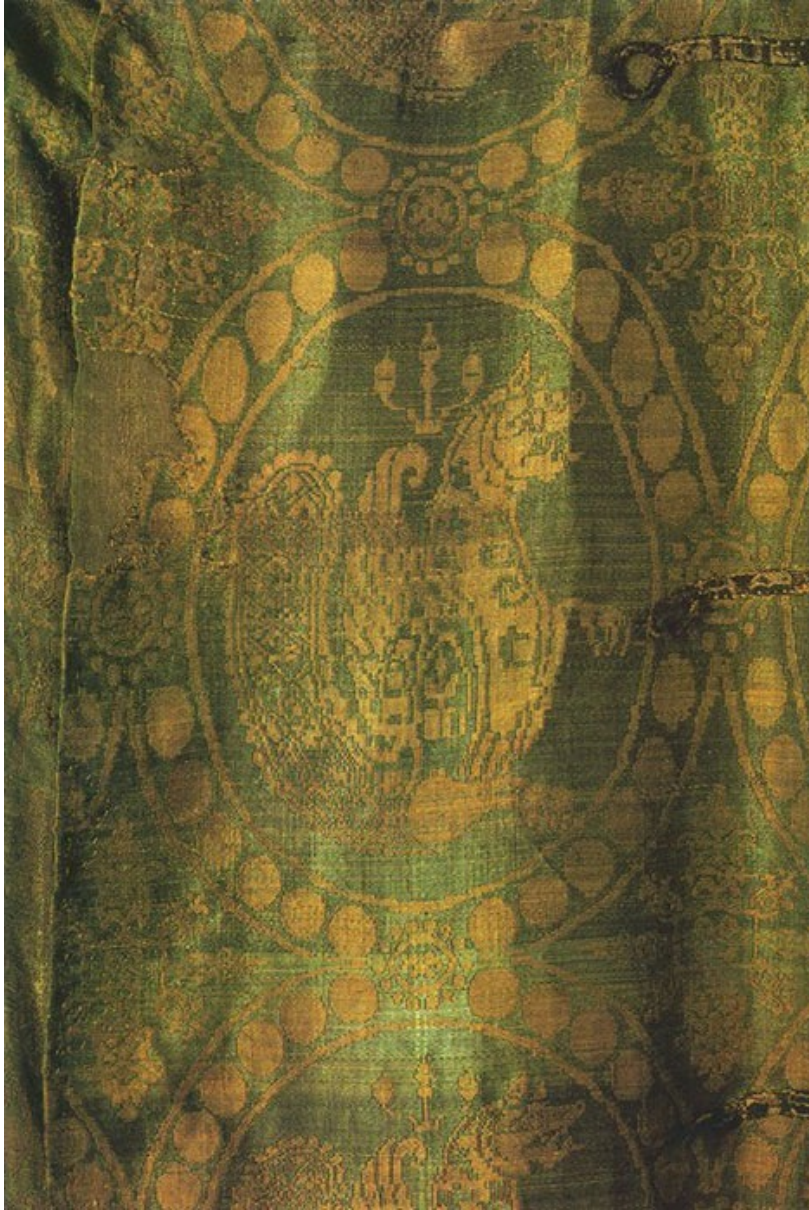
*Parade of the Guild of Glassblowers  
before the Ottoman Sultan Murâd III  
in the Old Hippodrome of Constantinople,  
for Sûr-Nâme-yi Humâyûn, c. 1582.*  
Library of the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul.





**Amir Khusraw Dihlavi**, *The Abduction by Sea*,  
folio from a *Khamsa* (Quintet), 1496.  
Opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper,  
27 x 19.3 cm. Freer Gallery of Art,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.





Caftan with Senmurvs (detail), 9<sup>th</sup> century.  
Silk (samite weave), length: 140 cm;  
width: 227 cm. The State Hermitage  
Museum, St Petersburg.

## CHAPTER 14

Leaving this castle, the road leads over a spacious plain, and then through a country diversified with hill and dale, where there is herbage and pasture, as well as fruits in great abundance, by which the army of Hulagu was enabled to remain so long upon the ground. This country extends to the distance of six full days'

journey. It contains many cities and fortified places, and the inhabitants are of the Mahometan religion. A desert then commences, extending forty or fifty miles, where there is no water and it is necessary that the traveller should make provision of this article at his outset. As the cattle find no drink until this desert is passed, the greatest expedition is necessary, that they may reach a watering place. At the end of the sixth day's journey, he arrives at a town named Sapurgan, which is plentifully supplied with every kind of provision, and is particularly celebrated for producing the best melons in the world. These are preserved in the following manner. They are cut spirally, in thin slices, as the pumpkin with us, and after they have been dried in the sun, are sent, in large quantities, for sale, to the neighbouring countries, where they are eagerly sought for being sweet as honey. Game is also in plenty there, both of beasts and birds.

Leaving this place, we shall now speak of another named Balach, a large and magnificent city. It was formerly still more considerable, but has sustained much injury from the Tartars, who in their frequent attacks have partly demolished its buildings. It contained many palaces constructed of marble and spacious squares, still visible, although in a ruinous state. It was in this city, according to the report of the inhabitants, that Alexander took to wife the daughter of King Darius. The Mahometan religion prevails here also. The dominion of the lord of the Eastern Tartars extends to this place, and to it the limits of the Persian Empire extend, in a north-easterly direction. Upon leaving Balach and holding the same course for two days, you traverse a country that is destitute of every sign of habitation, the people having all fled to strong places in the mountains in order to secure themselves against the predatory attacks of lawless marauders, by whom these districts are overrun. Here are extensive waters, and game of various kinds. Lions are also found in these parts, very large and numerous. Provisions, however, are scarce in the hilly tract passed during these two days, and the traveller must carry with him food sufficient both for himself and his cattle.

## **CHAPTER 15**

In the province of Balashan, the people are Mahometans, and have their peculiar language. It is an extensive kingdom, being in length twelve full days' journey, and is governed by princes in hereditary succession, who are all descended from Alexander, by the daughter of Darius, King of the Persians. All these have borne the title in the Saracenic tongue of Zul-karnen, being equivalent to Alexander. In this country are found the precious stones called balsas rubies, of fine quality and great value, so called from the name of the province. They are imbedded in the high mountains, but are searched for only in one, named Sikinan. In this the

King causes mines to be worked, in the same manner as for gold or silver; through this channel alone they are obtained, no person daring under pain of death to make an excavation for the purpose, unless as a special favour he obtains His Majesty's licence. Occasionally the King gives them as presents to strangers who pass through his dominions, as they are not procurable by purchase from others, and cannot be exported without his permission. His object in these restrictions is, that the rubies of his country, with which he thinks his credit connected, should preserve their estimation and maintain their high price; for if they could be dug for indiscriminately, and everyone could purchase and carry them out of the kingdom, so great is their abundance, that they would soon be of little value. Some he sends as complimentary gifts to other kings and princes; some he delivers as tribute (to his superior lord); some also he exchanges for gold and silver. These he allows to be exported. There are mountains likewise in which are found veins of lapis lazuli, the stone which yields the azure colour (ultramarine), here the finest in the world. The mines of silver, copper, and lead, are likewise very productive. It is a cold country. The horses bred here are of a superior quality, and have great speed. Their hoofs are so hard that they do not require shoeing. The natives are in the practice of galloping them on slopes where other cattle could not or would not venture to run. They asserted that not long since there were still found in this province horses of the breed of Alexander's celebrated Bucephalus, which were all foaled with a particular mark on the forehead. The whole of the breed was in the possession of one of the king's uncles, who, upon his refusal to yield them to his nephew, was put to death, whereupon his widow, exasperated at the murder, caused them all to be destroyed and thus the race was lost to the world. In the mountains there are falcons of the species called saker (*falco sacer*) which are excellent birds, and of strong flight, as well as of that called laner (*falco lanarius*). There are also goshawks of a perfect kind (*falco astur* or *falumbarius*), and sparrow hawks (*falco nisus*). The people of the country are expert at the chase both of beasts and birds. Good wheat is grown there, and a species of barley without the husk. There is no oil of olives, but they express it from certain nuts, and from the grain called sesame, which resembles the seed of flax, excepting that it is light-coloured; the oil this yields is better, and has more flavour than any other. It is used by the Tartars and other inhabitants of these parts.

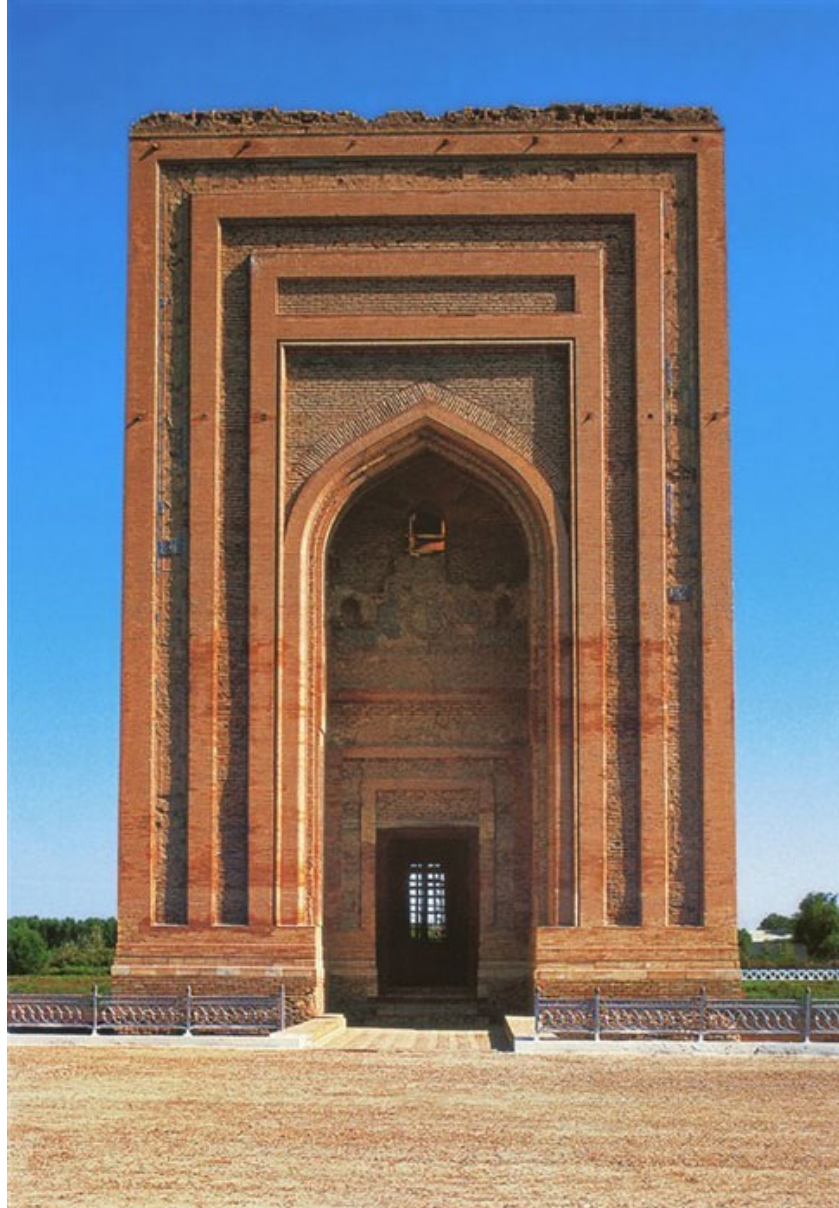
In this kingdom there are many narrow passes and strong situations which diminish the apprehension of any foreign power entering it with a hostile intention. The men are good archers and excellent sportsmen, generally clothing themselves with the skins of wild animals, other materials for the purpose being

scarce. The mountains afford pasture for an innumerable quantity of sheep, which ramble about in flocks of four, five, and 600, all wild, and although many are taken and killed, there does not appear to be any diminution. These mountains are exceedingly lofty, insomuch that it employs a man from morning till night to ascend to the top of them. Between them there are wide plains, clothed with grass and with trees, and large streams of the purest water precipitating themselves through the fissures of the rocks. In these streams are trout and many other delicate sorts of fish. On the summits of the mountains the air is so pure and so salubrious, that when those who dwell in the towns, and in the plains and valleys below, find themselves attacked with fevers or other inflammatory complaints, they immediately remove thither, and remaining for three or four days in that situation, recover their health. Marco Polo affirms that he had experience in his own person of its excellent effects, for having been confined by sickness in this country for nearly a year, he was advised to change the air by ascending the hills, when he presently became convalescent. A peculiar fashion of dress prevails amongst the women of the superior class, who wear below their waists, in the manner of drawers, a kind of garment, in the making of which they employ, according to their means, a hundred, eighty, or sixty ells of fine cotton cloth, which they also gather or plait, in order to increase the apparent size of their hips, those being accounted the most handsome who are the most bulky in that part.





Fakhr al-Din al-Razi Mausoleum,  
12<sup>th</sup> century. Kunya Urgench (Turkmenistan).



Portal, Turabek-Khanym Mausoleum.  
Kunya-Urgench (Turkmenistan).

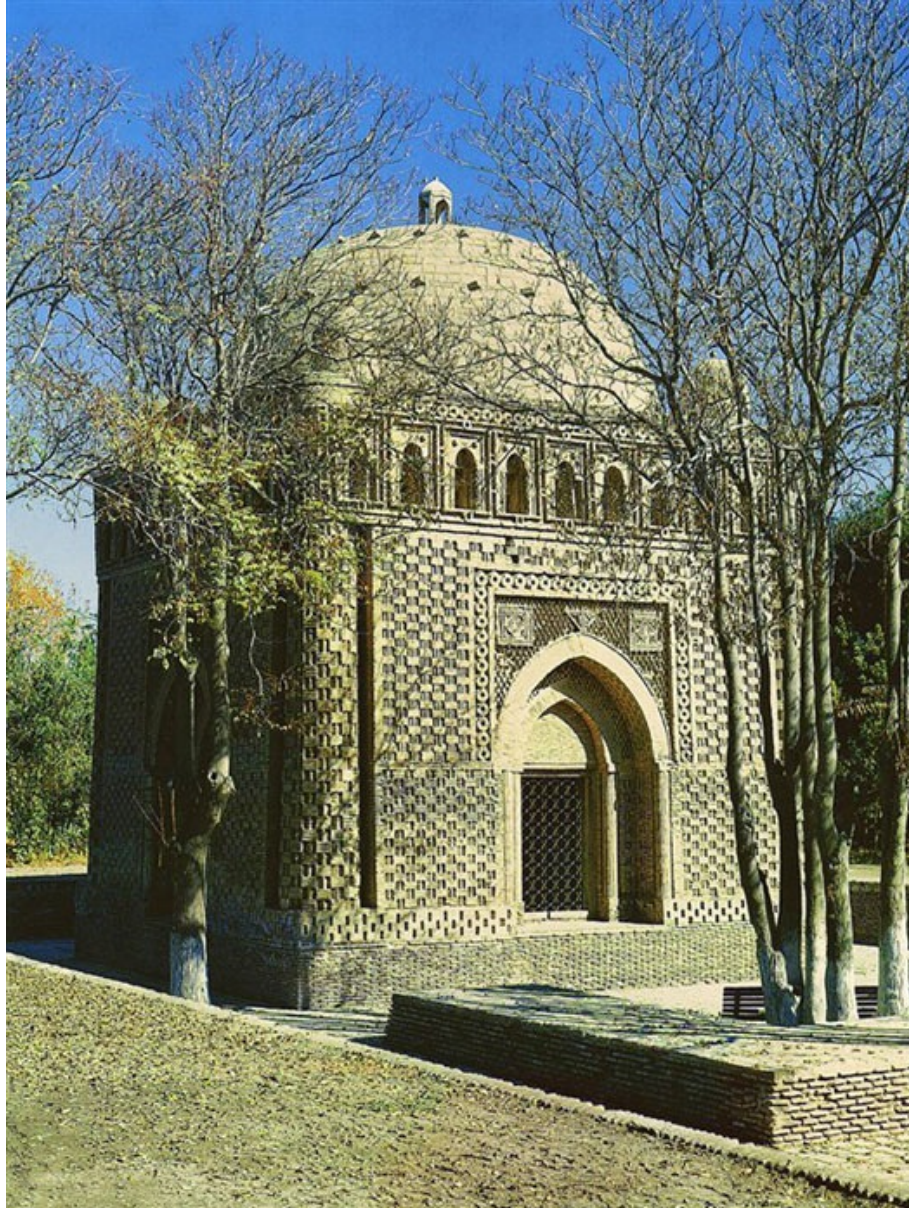
## CHAPTER 16

Kesmur is a province whose inhabitants also have their peculiar language. They are adept beyond all others in the art of magic, insomuch that they can compel their idols, although by nature dumb and deaf, to speak; they can likewise obscure the day, and perform many other miracles. They are pre-eminent amongst the idolatrous nations, and from them the idols, worshipped in other parts, proceed. From this country there is a communication by water with the

Indian Sea. The natives are of a dark complexion, but by no means black; the women, although dark, very comely. Their food is flesh, with rice and other grains; yet they are in general of a spare habit. The climate is moderately warm. In this province, besides the capital, there are many other towns and strong places. There are also woods, desert tracts, and difficult passes in the mountains, which give security to the inhabitants against invasion. Their king is not tributary to any power. They have amongst them a particular class of devotees, who live in communities, observe strict abstinence in regard to eating, drinking, and the intercourse of the sexes, and refrain from every kind of sensual indulgence, in order that they may not give offence to the idols whom they worship. These persons live to a considerable age. They have several monasteries, in which certain superiors exercise the functions of our abbots, and by the mass of the people they are held in great reverence. The natives of this country do not deprive any creature of life, nor shed blood, and if they are inclined to eat flesh-meat, it is necessary that the Mahometans who reside amongst them should slay the animal. The article of coral carried thither from Europe is sold at a higher price than in any other part of the world.

If I were to proceed in the same direction, it would lead me to India, but I have judged it proper to reserve the description of that country for a third book, and shall therefore return to Balashan, intending to pursue from thence the straight road to Cathay, and to describe, as has been done from the commencement of the work, not only the countries through which the route immediately lies, but also those in its vicinity, to the right and left.



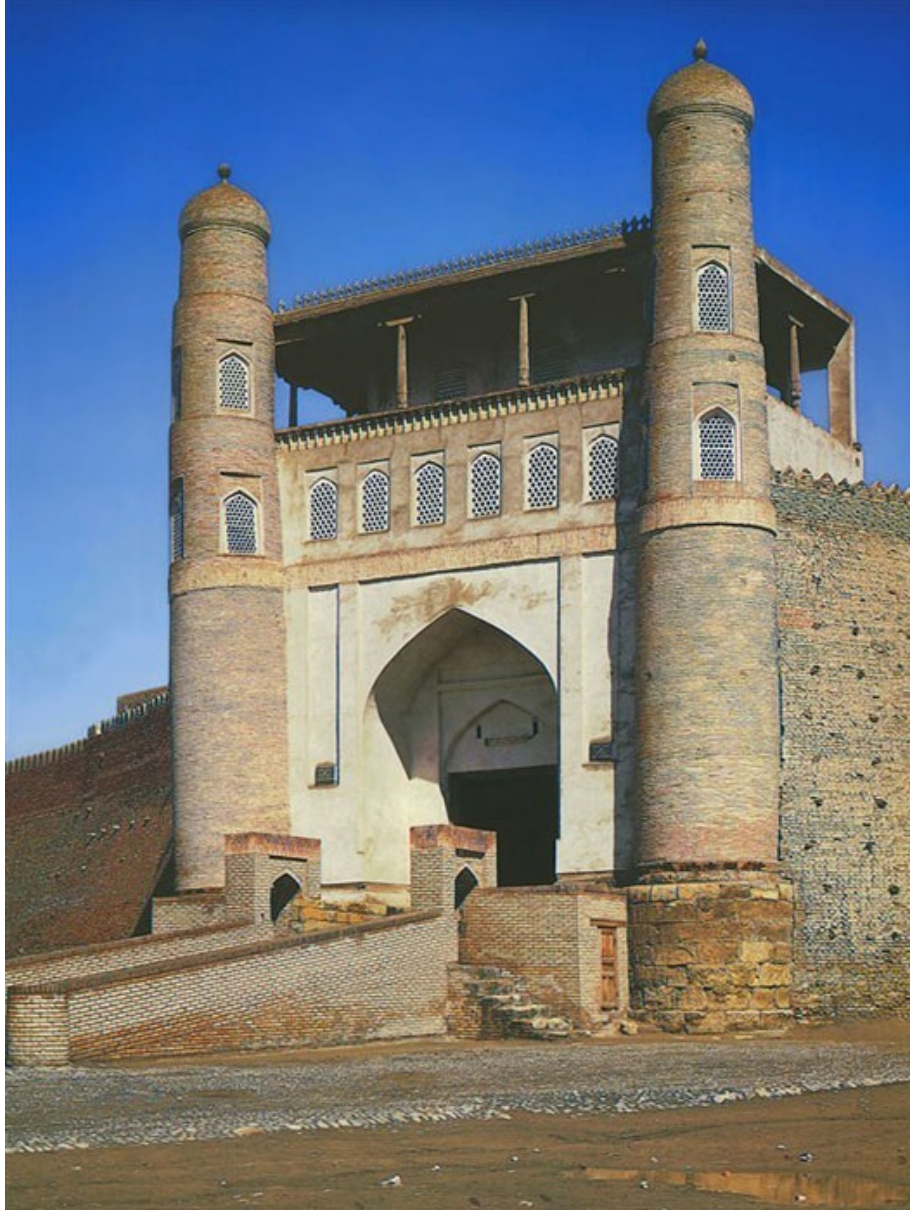


Samanid Mausoleum, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century.  
Bukhara (Uzbekistan).





Fortress walls, The Ark. Bukhara (Uzbekistan).



Portal, The Ark, fortress. Bukhara (Uzbekistan).

## CHAPTER 17

Leaving the province of Balashan, and travelling in a direction between north-east and east, you pass many castles and habitations on the banks of the river, belonging to the brother of the King of that place, and after three days' journey, reach a province named Vokhan; which itself extends in length and width to the distance of three days' journey. The people are Mahometans, have a distinct language, are civilised in their manners, and accounted valiant in war. Their chief holds his territory as a fief dependent upon Balashan. They practise various

modes of taking wild animals. Upon leaving this country, and proceeding for three days, still in an east-north-east course, ascending mountain after mountain, you at length arrive at a point of the road where you might suppose the surrounding summits to be the highest lands in the world. Here, between two ranges, you perceive a large lake, from which flows a handsome river, that pursues its course along an extensive plain, covered with the richest verdure. Such indeed is its quality that the leanest cattle turned upon it would become fat in the course of ten days. In this plain there are wild animals in great numbers, particularly sheep of a large size, having horns three, four, and even six palms in length. Of these the shepherds form ladles and vessels for holding their victuals; and with the same materials they construct fences for enclosing their cattle, and securing them against the wolves, with which, they say, the country is infested, and which likewise destroy many of these wild sheep or goats. Their horns and bones being found in large quantities, heaps are made of them at the sides of the road, for the purpose of guiding travellers at the season when it is covered with snow. For twelve days the course is along this elevated plain, which is named Pamer; and as during all that time you do not meet with any habitations, it is necessary to make provision at the outset accordingly. So great is the height of the mountains, that no birds are to be seen near their summits, and however extraordinary it may be thought, it was affirmed, that from the keenness of the air, fires when lighted do not give the same heat as in lower situations, nor produce the same effect in dressing victuals.

After having performed this journey of twelve days, you have still forty days to travel in the same direction, over mountains, and through valleys, in perpetual succession, passing many rivers and desert tracts, without seeing any habitations or the appearance of verdure. Every article of provision must therefore be carried along with you. This region is called Beloro. Even amidst the highest of these mountains, there lives a tribe of savage, ill-disposed, and idolatrous people, who subsist upon the animals they can destroy, and clothe themselves with the skins.



Exterior view, The Ark, fortress. Bukhara (Uzbekistan).

## CHAPTER 18

Samarkand is a noble city, adorned with beautiful gardens, and surrounded by a plain, in which are produced all the fruits that man can desire. The inhabitants, who are partly Christians and partly Mahometans, are subject to the dominion of a nephew of the Grand Khan, with whom, however, he is not upon amicable terms, but on the contrary there is perpetual strife and frequent wars between them. This city lies in the direction of north-west. A miracle is said to have taken place there, under the following circumstances. Not long ago, a prince named Zagatai, who was brother to the (then reigning) Grand Khan, became a convert to Christianity; greatly to the delight of the Christian inhabitants of the place, who under the favour and protection of the prince, proceeded to build a church, and dedicated it to St John the Baptist. It was so constructed that all the weight of the roof (being circular) should rest upon a column in the centre, and beneath this, as a base, they fixed a square stone, which, with the permission of the prince, they had taken from a temple belonging to the Mahometans, who dared not to prevent them from so doing. But upon the death of Zagatai, his son who succeeded him showing no disposition to become a Christian, the Mussulmans had influence enough to obtain from him an order that their opponents should



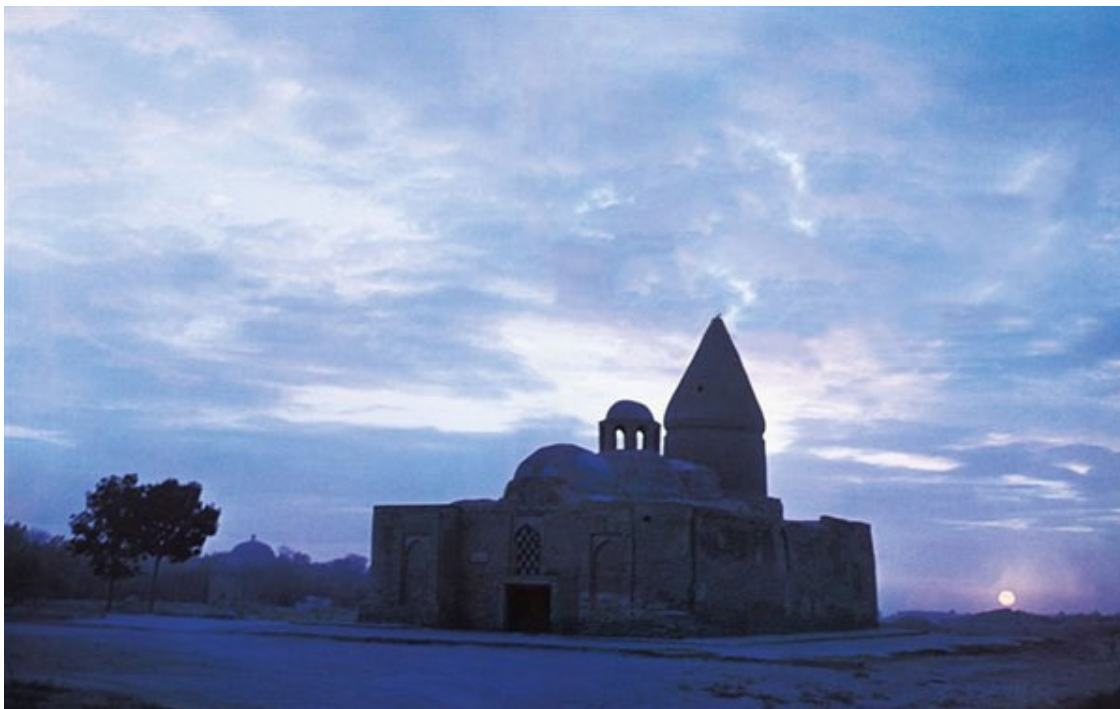
restore to them the stone they had appropriated; and although the latter offered to pay them compensation in money, they refused to listen to the proposal, because they hoped that its removal would occasion the church to tumble down. In this difficulty the afflicted Christians had no other resource than with tears and humility to recommend themselves to the protection of the glorious St John the Baptist. When the day arrived on which they were to make restitution of the stone, it came to pass that through the intercession of the Saint, the pillar raised itself from its base to the height of three palms, in order to facilitate the removal of the stone; in that situation, without any kind of support, it remains to the present day.

## **CHAPTER 19**

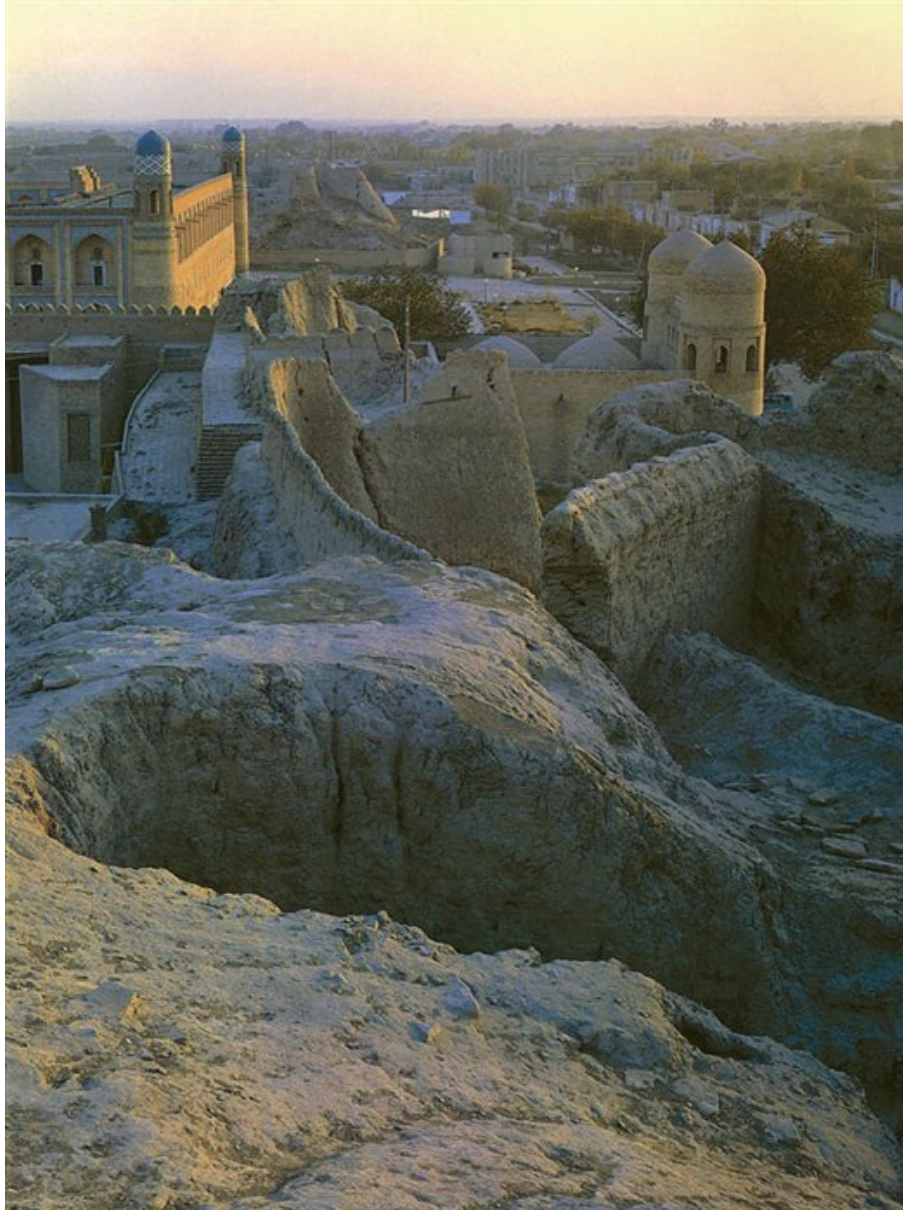
Peyn is a province of five days' journey in extent, in the direction of east-north-east. It is under the dominion of the Grand Khan, and contains many cities and strong places, the principal one of which is likewise named Peyn. Through this flows a river, and in its bed are found many of those stones called chalcedonies and jasper. All kinds of provision are obtained here. Cotton also is produced in the country. The inhabitants live by manufacture and trade. They have this custom, that if a married man goes to a distance from home to be absent twenty days, his wife has a right, if she is inclined, to take another husband; the men, on the same principle, marry wherever they happen to reside. All the before-mentioned provinces, that is to say, Kashcar, Kotan, Peyn, and as far as the desert of Lop, are within the limits of Turkistan.



Magoki-Attari Mosque, 12<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century.  
Bukhara (Uzbekistan).



Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum. Bukhara (Uzbekistan).



City walls, Itchan Kala. Khiva (Uzbekistan).

## CHAPTER 20

When the journey of thirty days across the desert has been completed, you arrive at a city called Sachion, which belongs to the Grand Khan. The province is named Tanguth. The people are worshippers of idols. There are Turkomans among them, with a few Nestorian Christians and Mahometans.

Those who are idolaters have a language distinct from the others. This city lies towards the east-north-east. They are not a commercial, but an agricultural people, having much wheat. There are in this country a number of monasteries



and abbeys, which are filled with idols of various descriptions. To these, which they regard with the profoundest reverence, they also offer sacrifices, and upon the birth of a son, they recommend him to the protection of one of their idols. In honour of this deity the father rears a sheep in his house until the expiration of a year, when, upon the day of the idol's particular festival, they conduct their son, together with the sheep, into its presence, and there sacrifice the animal. The flesh they stew, and then they carry it and lay it before the idol, and stand there until they have finished a long prayer, the subject of which is to entreat the idol to preserve the health of their child; they believe that during this interval it has sucked in all the savoury juices of the meat. The remaining substances they then carry home, and, assembling all their relations and friends, eat it with much devout festivity. They collect the bones, and preserve them in handsome urns. The priests of the idol have for their portion the head, the feet, the intestines, and the skin, together with some parts of the flesh. In respect to the dead, likewise, these idolaters have particular ceremonies. Upon the decease of a person of rank, whose body it is intended to burn, the relations call together the astrologers, and make them acquainted with the year, the day, and the hour in which he was born; whereupon these proceed to examine the horoscope, and having ascertained the constellation or sign, and the planet therein presiding, declare the day on which the funeral ceremony shall take place. If it should happen that the same planet is not then in the ascendant, they order the body to be kept a week or more, and sometimes even for the space of six months, before they allow the ceremony to be performed. In the hope of a propitious aspect, and dreading the effects of a contrary influence, the relations do not presume to burn the corpse until the astrologers have fixed the proper time. It being necessary on this account that, in many cases, the body should remain long in the house, in order to guard against the consequences of putrefaction, they prepare a coffin made of boards a palm in thickness, well fitted together and painted, in which they deposit the corpse, and along with it a quantity of sweet-scented gums, camphor, and other drugs; the joints or seams they smear with a mixture of pitch and lime, and the whole is then covered with silk. During this period the table is spread every day with bread, wine, and other provisions, which remain so long as is necessary for a convenient meal, as well as for the spirit of the deceased, which they suppose to be present on the occasion, to satisfy itself with the fumes of the victuals. Sometimes the astrologers signify to the relations that the body must not be conveyed from the house through the principal door, in consequence of their having discovered from the aspect of the heavens, or otherwise, that such a course would be unlucky, and it must therefore be taken out from a different side of the house. In some instances, indeed, they oblige them to break through the

wall that happens to stand opposite to the propitious and beneficent planet, and to convey the corpse through that aperture, persuading them that if they should refuse to do so, the spirit of the defunct would be incensed against the family and cause them some injury. Accordingly, when any misfortune befalls a house, or any person belonging to it meets with an accident or loss, or with an untimely death, the astrologers do not fail to attribute the event to a funeral not having taken place during the ascendancy of the planet under which the deceased relative was born, but, on the contrary, when it was exposed to a malign influence, or to its not having been conducted through the proper door. As the ceremony of burning the body must be performed without the city, they erect from space to space in the road by which the procession is to pass, small wooden buildings, with a portico which they cover with silk, and under these, as it arrives at each, the body is set down. They place before it meats and liquors, and this is repeated until they reach the appointed spot, believing, as they do, that the spirit is thereby refreshed and acquires energy to attend the funeral pile. Another ceremony also is practised on these occasions. They provide a number of pieces of paper, made of the bark of a certain tree, upon which are painted the figures of men, women, horses, camels, pieces of money, and dresses, and these they burn along with the corpse, under the persuasion that in the next world the deceased will enjoy the services and use of the domestics, cattle, and all the articles depicted on the paper. During the whole of these proceedings, all the musical instruments belonging to the place are sounded with an incessant din.

## CHAPTER 21

Upon leaving the district last mentioned, and proceeding for ten days in the direction of east-north-east, through a country where there are few habitations, and little of any kind worthy of remark, you arrive at a district named Succuir, in which are many towns and castles, the principal one being likewise named Succuir. The inhabitants are in general idolaters, with some Christians. They are subject to the dominion of the Grand Khan. The extensive province, which contains these and the two districts which shall be next mentioned, is called Tanguth, and throughout all the mountainous parts of it the most excellent kind of rhubarb is produced, in large quantities, and the merchants who procure loadings of it on the spot convey it to all parts of the world. It is a fact that when they take that road, they cannot venture amongst the mountains with any beasts of burden excepting those accustomed to the country, on account of a poisonous plant growing there, which, if eaten by them, has the effect of causing the hoofs of the animal to drop off, but those of the country, being aware of its dangerous

quality, take care to avoid it. The people of Succuir depend for subsistence upon the fruits of the earth and the flesh of their cattle, and do not engage in trade. The district is perfectly healthy, and the complexion of the natives is brown.



Exterior view, Ulugh Beg Madrasah.  
Bukhara (Uzbekistan).

## CHAPTER 22

Kampion, the chief city of the province of Tanguth, is large and magnificent, and has jurisdiction over the entire province.

The bulk of the people worship idols, but there are some who follow the religion of Mahomet, and some Christians. The latter have three large and handsome churches in the city. The idolaters have many religious houses, or monasteries and abbeys, built after the manner of the country, and in these a multitude of idols, some of which are of wood, some of stone, and some of clay, are covered with gilding. They are carved in a masterly style. Among these are some of very large size, and others are small. The former are full ten paces in length, and lie in a recumbent posture; the small figures stand behind them, and have the appearance of disciples in the act of reverential salutation. Both great and small are held in extreme veneration. Those amongst the idolaters who are devoted to the services of religion lead more correct lives, according to their ideas of morality, than the other classes, abstaining from the indulgence of carnal and sensual appetites.

The unlicensed intercourse of the sexes is not in general considered by these

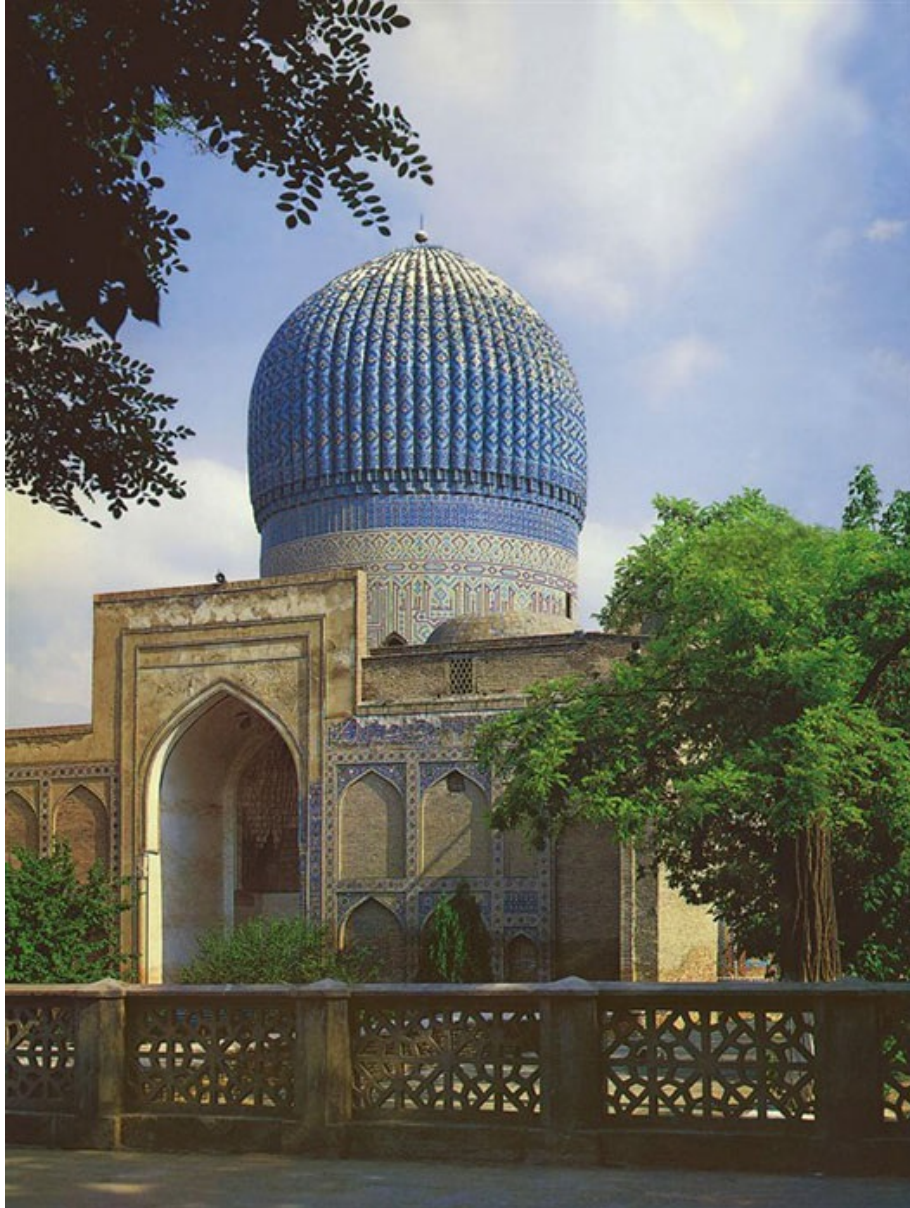


people as a serious offence; their maxim is, that if the advances are made by the female, the connection does not constitute an offence, but it is held to be such when the proposal comes from the man. They employ an almanac, in many respects like our own, according to the rules of which, during five, four, or three days in the month, they do not shed blood, nor eat flesh or fowl; as is our usage in regard to Friday, the Sabbath, and the vigils of the saints. The laity take to themselves as many as thirty wives, some more, some fewer, according to their ability to maintain them, for they do not receive any dowry with them, but, on the contrary, settle dowers upon their wives, in cattle, slaves, and money. The wife who is first married always maintains the superior rank in the family, but if the husband observes that any one amongst them does not conduct herself well to the rest, or if she becomes otherwise disagreeable to him, he can send her away. They take to their beds those who are nearly related to them by blood, and even espouse their mothers-in-law. Many other mortal sins are regarded by them with indifference, and they live in this respect like the beasts of the field. In this city Marco Polo remained, along with his father and uncle, about the space of one year, which the state of their concerns rendered necessary.

## CHAPTER 23

The circumstances under which these Tartars first began to exercise dominion shall now be related. They dwelt in the northern countries of Jorza and Bargu, but without fixed habitations, that is, without towns or fortified places, where there were extensive plains, good pasture, large rivers, and plenty of water. They had no sovereign of their own, and were tributary to a powerful prince, who (as I have been informed) was named in their language, Un-Khan, by some thought to have the same signification as Prester John in ours. To him these Tartars paid yearly the tenth part of (the increase of) their cattle. In process of time the tribe multiplied so exceedingly that Un-Khan, that is to say, Prester John, becoming apprehensive of their strength, conceived the plan of separating them into different bodies, who should take up their abode in distinct tracts of country. With this view also, whenever the occasion presented itself, such as a rebellion in any of the provinces subject to him, he drafted three or four in the hundred of these people, to be employed on the service of quelling it; thus their power was gradually diminished. He in like manner dispatched them upon other expeditions, and sent among them some of his principal officers to see that his intentions were carried into effect. At length the Tartars, becoming sensible of the slavery to which he attempted to reduce them, resolved to maintain a strict union amongst themselves, and seeing that nothing short of their final ruin was

in contemplation, they adopted the measure of removing from the places which they then inhabited, and proceeded in a northerly direction across a wide desert, until they felt assured that the distance afforded them security, when they refused any longer to pay to Un-Khan the accustomed tribute.



Gur-e Amir Mausoleum, 15<sup>th</sup> century.  
Samarkand (Uzbekistan).



Shah-i-Zinda Mausoleum. Samarkand (Uzbekistan).





Pitcher, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

## CHAPTER 24

Sometime after the migration of the Tartars to this place, and about the year of our Lord 1162, they proceeded to elect for their king a man who was named Chingis-Khan, one of approved integrity, great wisdom, commanding eloquence, and eminent for his valour. He began his reign with so much justice and moderation, that he was beloved and revered as their deity rather than their sovereign; the fame of his great and good qualities spreading over that part of the

world, all the Tartars, however dispersed, placed themselves under his command. Finding himself thus at the head of so many brave men, he became ambitious of emerging from the deserts and wildernesses by which he was surrounded, and gave them orders to equip themselves with bows and such other weapons as they were expert at using, from the habits of their pastoral life. He then proceeded to render himself master of cities and provinces, and such was the effect produced by his character for justice and other virtues, that wherever he went, he found the people disposed to submit to him, and to esteem themselves happy when admitted to his protection and favour. In this manner he acquired the possession of about nine provinces. Nor is his success surprising, when we consider that at this period each town and district was either governed by the people themselves, or had its petty king or lord; as there existed amongst them no general confederacy, it was impossible for them to resist, separately, so formidable a power. Upon the subjugation of these places, he appointed governors to them, who were so exemplary in their conduct that the inhabitants did not suffer, either in their persons or their properties; and he likewise adopted the policy of taking along with him, into other provinces, the principal people, on whom he bestowed allowances and gratuities.

Seeing how prosperously his enterprises succeeded, he resolved upon attempting still greater things. With this view he sent ambassadors to Prester John, charged with an ostentatious message, which he knew at the same time would not be listened to by that prince, demanding his daughter in marriage. Upon receiving the application, the monarch indignantly exclaimed: "Whence arises this presumption in Chingis-Khan, who, knowing himself to be my servant, dares to ask for the hand of my child? Depart instantly," he said, "and let him know from me, that upon the repetition of such a demand, I shall put him to an ignominious death". Enraged at this reply, Chingis-Khan collected a very large army, at the head of which he entered the territory of Prester John, and encamping on a great plain called Tenduk, sent a message desiring him to defend himself. The latter advanced likewise to the plain with a vast army, and took his position at the distance of about ten miles from the other. In this conjuncture Chingis-Khan commanded his astrologers and magicians to declare to him which of the two armies, in the approaching conflict, should obtain the victory. Upon this they took a green reed, and dividing it lengthways into two parts, they wrote upon one the name of their master, and upon the other the name of Un-Khan. They then placed them on the ground, at some distance from each other, and gave notice to the King that during the time of their pronouncing their incantations, the two pieces of reed, through the power of their idols, would advance towards each other, and that the victory would fall to the lot of that

monarch whose piece should be seen to mount upon the other. The whole army was assembled to be spectators of this ceremony, and whilst the astrologers were employed in reading their books of necromancy, they perceived the two pieces begin to move and to approach, and after some small interval of time, that inscribed with the name of Chingis-Khan to place itself upon the top of its adversary. Upon witnessing this, the King and his band of Tartars marched with exultation to the attack of the army of Un-Khan, broke through its ranks and entirely routed it. Un-Khan himself was killed, his kingdom fell to the conqueror, and Chingis-Khan espoused his daughter. After this battle he continued during six years to render himself master of additional kingdoms and cities, until at length, in the siege of a castle named Thaigin, he was struck by an arrow in the knee, and dying of the wound, was buried in the mountain of Altai.



Vessel, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century. Clay,  
thrown on a potter's wheel, with sized  
polychrome decoration on a slip layer,  
height: 46 cm. The Institute of History of  
the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat.





**Muhammad ibn Nasir ibn Muhammad**  
**al-Harawi**, Bucket, late 12<sup>th</sup> - early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Bronze (brass), cast, inlaid with silver and copper, engraved and gilded, height to rim: 18.8 cm; diameter: 21.5 cm.

The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

## CHAPTER 25

Now that I have begun speaking of the Tartars, I will tell you more about them. The Tartars never remain fixed, but as the winter approaches remove to the plains of a warmer region, in order to find sufficient pasture for their cattle; in summer they frequent cold situations in the mountains, where there is water and

verdure, and their cattle are free from the annoyance of horse-flies and other biting insects. During two or three months they progressively ascend higher ground, and seek fresh pasture, the grass not being adequate in any one place to feed the multitudes of which their herds and flocks consist. Their huts or tents are formed of rods covered with felt, and being exactly round, and nicely put together, they can gather them into one bundle, and make them up as packages, which they carry along with them in their migrations, upon a sort of car with four wheels. When they have occasion to set them up again, they always make the entrance face to the south. Besides these cars they have a superior kind of vehicle upon two wheels, covered likewise with black felt, and so effectually as to protect those within it from wet, during a whole day of rain. These are drawn by oxen and camels, and serve to convey their wives and children, their utensils, and such provisions as they require. It is the women who attend to their trading concerns, who buy and sell, and provide everything necessary for their husbands and their families, the time of the men being entirely devoted to hunting and hawking, and matters that relate to military life. They have the best falcons in the world, and also the best dogs. They subsist entirely upon flesh and milk, eating the produce of their sport, and a certain small animal, not unlike a rabbit, called by our people 'Pharaoh's mice', which during the summer season are found in great abundance in the plains. But they likewise eat flesh of every description, horses, camels, and even dogs, provided they are fat. They drink mares' milk, which they prepare in such a manner that it has the qualities and flavour of white wine. They term it in their language *kemurs*. Their women are not excelled in the world for chastity and decency of conduct, nor for love and duty to their husbands. Infidelity to the marriage bed is regarded by them as a vice not merely dishonourable, but of the most infamous nature; on the other hand it is admirable to observe the loyalty of the husbands towards their wives, amongst whom, although there are perhaps ten or twenty, there prevails a degree of quiet and union that is highly laudable. No offensive language is ever heard, their attention being fully occupied with their traffic (as already mentioned) and their several domestic employments, such as the provision of necessary food for the family, the management of the servants, and the care of the children, which are amongst them a common concern. And the more praiseworthy are the virtues of modesty and chastity in the wives, because the men are allowed the indulgence of taking as many as they choose. Their expense to the husband is not great, and on the other hand the benefit he derives from their trading, and from the occupations in which they are constantly engaged, is considerable; on which account it is, that when he receives a young woman in marriage, he pays a dower to her parent. The wife who is the first espoused has the privilege of superior attention, and is

held to be the most legitimate, which extends also to the children borne by her. In consequence of this unlimited number of wives, the offspring is more numerous than amongst any other people. Upon the death of the father, the son may take to himself the wives he leaves behind, with the exception of his own mother. They cannot take their sisters to wife, but upon the death of their brothers they can marry their sisters-in-law. Every marriage is solemnised with great ceremony.



*Crowned head, 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century.*  
Limestone, height: 30 cm.  
Khalili Collections.





Exterior entrance to the tomb of Tamerlane, Gur-e Amir Complex. Samarkand (Uzbekistan).

## CHAPTER 26

The doctrine and faith of the Tartars are these: They believe in a deity whose nature is sublime and heavenly. To him they burn incense in censers, and offer up prayers for the enjoyment of intellectual and bodily health. They worship another likewise, named Natigay, whose image, covered with felt or other cloth, every individual preserves in his house. To this deity they associate a wife and children, placing the former on his left side, and the latter before him, in a posture of reverential salutation. Him they consider as the divinity who presides over their terrestrial concerns, protects their children, and guards their cattle and their grain. They show him great respect, and at their meals they never omit to take a fat morsel of the flesh and use it to grease the mouth of the idol, along with the mouths of its wife and children. They then throw out of the door some of the liquor in which the meat has been dressed, as an offering to the other spirits. This being done, they consider that their deity and his family have had their proper share, and proceed to eat and drink without further ceremony. The rich amongst these people dress in cloth of gold and silks, with skins of sable, ermine, and other animals. All their accoutrements are of an expensive kind. Their arms are bows, iron maces, and in some instances, spears; but the first is the weapon at which they are the most expert, being accustomed, from children,

to employ it in their sports. They wear defensive armour made of the thick hides of buffalo and other beasts, dried by the fire, and thus rendered extremely hard and strong. They are brave in battle, almost to desperation, setting little value upon their lives, and exposing themselves without hesitation to all manner of danger. Their disposition is cruel. They are capable of supporting every kind of privation, and when there is a necessity for it, can live for a month on the milk of their mares, and upon such wild animals as they may chance to catch. Their horses are fed upon grass alone, and do not require barley or other grain. The men are habituated to remain on horseback during two days and two nights, without dismounting, sleeping in that situation whilst their horses graze. No people upon earth can surpass them in fortitude under difficulties, nor show greater patience under wants of every kind. They are perfectly obedient to their chiefs, and are maintained at small expense. From these qualities, so essential to the formation of soldiers, it is that they are fitted to subdue the world, as in fact they have done in regard to a considerable portion of it.



Façade detail of the Ulugh Beg  
Madrasah courtyard. Bukhara (Uzbekistan).

## CHAPTER 27

When one of the great Tartar chiefs proceeds on an expedition, he puts himself at the head of an army of 100,000 horses, and organises them in the following manner. He appoints an officer to the command of every ten men, and others to command a hundred, 1,000, and 10,000 men, respectively. Thus ten of the officers commanding ten men take their orders from him who commands a hundred; of these, each ten, from him who commands 1,000; and each ten of these latter, from him who commands 10,000. By this arrangement each officer has only to attend to the management of ten men or ten bodies of men, and when the commander of these 100,000 men has occasion to make a detachment for any particular service, he issues his orders to the commanders of 10,000 to furnish him with a 1,000 men each, and these, in like manner, to the commanders of a 1,000, who give their orders to those commanding a hundred, until the order reaches those commanding ten, by whom the number required is immediately supplied to their superior officers. A hundred men are in this manner delivered to every officer commanding 1,000, and 1,000 men to every officer commanding 10,000. The drafting takes place without delay, and all are implicitly obedient to their respective superiors. Every company of a hundred men is denominated a

*tuc*, and ten of these constitute a *toman*. When the army proceeds on service, a body of men is sent two days' march in advance, and parties are stationed upon each flank and in the rear, in order to prevent its being attacked by surprise. When the service is distant, they carry but little with them, and that, chiefly, which is requisite for their encampment, and utensils for cooking. They subsist for the most part upon milk, as has been said. Each man has, on an average, eighteen horses and mares, and when that which they ride is fatigued, they change it for another. They are provided with small tents made of felt, under which they shelter themselves against rain. Should circumstances render it necessary, in the execution of a duty that requires dispatch, they can march for ten days together without dressing victuals, during which time they subsist upon the blood drawn from their horses, each man opening a vein, and drinking from his own cattle. They make provision also of milk, thickened and dried to the state of a hard paste (or curd), which is prepared in the following manner. They boil the milk, and skimming off the rich or creamy part as it rises to the top, put it into a separate vessel as butter; for so long as that remains in the milk, it will not become hard. The latter is then exposed to the sun until it dries. Upon going on service they carry with them about ten pounds for each man, and of this, half a pound is put, every morning, into a leathern bottle, or small outre, with as much water as is thought necessary. By their motion in riding the contents are violently shaken, and a thin porridge is produced, upon which they make their dinner. When these Tartars come to engage in battle, they never mix with the enemy, but keep hovering about him, discharging their arrows first from one side and then from the other, occasionally pretending to fly, and during their flight shooting arrows backwards at their pursuers, killing men and horses, as if they were combatting face to face. In this sort of warfare the adversary imagines he has gained a victory, when in fact he has lost the battle, for the Tartars, observing the mischief they have done him, wheel about, and renewing the fight, overpower his remaining troops, and make them prisoners in spite of their utmost exertions. Their horses are so well broken-in to quick changes of movement, that upon the signal given, they instantly turn in every direction; and by these rapid manoeuvres many victories have been obtained. All that has been here related is spoken of the original manners of the Tartar chiefs, but at the present day they are much corrupted. Those who dwell at Ukaka, forsaking their own laws, have adopted the customs of the people who worship idols, and those who inhabit the eastern provinces have adopted the manners of the Saracens.

## CHAPTER 28



Justice is administered by them in the following manner. When a person is convicted of a robbery not meriting the punishment of death, he is condemned to receive a certain number of strokes with a cane: seven, seventeen, twenty-seven, thirty-seven, forty-seven, or as far as 107, according to the value of the article stolen and circumstances of the theft, and many die under this chastisement. When for stealing a horse or other article that subjects the offender to capital punishment, he is condemned to suffer death; the sentence is executed by cutting his body in two with a sword. But if the thief has the means of paying nine times the value of the property stolen, he escapes all further punishment. It is usual for every chief of a tribe or other person possessing large cattle, such as horses, mares, camels, oxen, or cows, to distinguish them by his mark, and then to suffer them to graze at large, in any part of the plains or mountains, without employing herdsmen to look after them; and if any of them should happen to mix with the cattle of other proprietors, they are restored to the person whose mark they bear. Sheep and goats, on the contrary, have people to attend them. Their cattle of every kind are well-sized, fat, and exceedingly handsome.

When one man has had a son, and another man a daughter, although both may have been dead for some years, they have a practice of contracting a marriage between their deceased children, and of bestowing the girl upon the youth. They at the same time paint upon pieces of paper human figures to represent attendants with horses and other animals, dresses of all kinds, money, and every article of furniture, and all these, together with the marriage contract, which is regularly drawn up, they commit to the flames, in order that through the medium of the smoke (as they believe) these things may be conveyed to their children in the other world, and that they may become husband and wife in due form. After this ceremony, the fathers and mothers consider themselves as mutually related, in the same manner as if a real connection had taken place between their living children. Having thus given an account of the manners and customs of the Tartars, although not yet of the brilliant acts and enterprises of their Grand Khan, who is lord of all the Tartars, we shall now return to our former subject, that is, to the extensive plain which we were traversing when we stopped to relate the history of this people.



Kazi Zade Rumi Mausoleum.  
Samarkand (Uzbekistan).



Portal, Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis.  
Samarkand (Uzbekistan).

## CHAPTER 29

Tenduk, belonging to the territory of Prester John, is an eastern province, in which there are many cities and castles, subject to the rule of the Grand Khan, all the princes of that family having remained dependent, since Chingis, the first Emperor, subdued the country. The capital is likewise named Tenduk. The King now reigning is a descendant of Prester John, and is still Prester John, and named George. He is both a Christian and a priest, the greater part of the inhabitants

being also Christians. This King George holds his country as a fief of the Grand Khan, not, indeed, the entire possessions of the original Prester John, but a certain portion of them, and the Khan always bestows upon him, as well as upon the other princes of his house, his daughters, and other females of the royal family, in marriage. In this province, the stone of which the azure colour is made is found in abundance, and of fine quality. Here likewise they manufacture stuffs of camels' hair. The people gain their subsistence by agriculture, trade, and mechanical labours. Although subject to the dominion of the Grand Khan, the King being a Christian, as has been said, the government of the country is in the hands of Christians. Amongst the inhabitants, however, there are both worshippers of idols and followers of the law of Mahomet. There is likewise a class of people known by the appellation of Argon, because they are produced from a mixture of two races, namely, those natives of Tenduk who are idolaters, and the Mahometans. The men of this country are fairer complexioned and better looking than those in the other countries of which we have been speaking, and also better instructed, and more skilful traders.

## **CHAPTER 30**

In this province (of Tenduk) was the principal seat of government of the sovereigns styled Prester John, when they ruled over the Tartars of this and the neighbouring countries, and which their successors occupy to the present hour. George, above-mentioned, is the fourth in descent from Prester John, of whose family he is regarded as the head. There are two regions in which they exercise dominion. These in our part of the world are named Gog and Magog, but by the natives Ung and Mongul, in each of which there is a distinct race of people. In Ung they are Gog, and in Mongul they are Tartars. Travelling seven days through this province, in an easterly direction, towards Cathay, you pass many towns inhabited by idolaters, as well as by Mahometans and Nestorian Christians. They gain their living by trade and manufactures, weaving, fine-gold tissues, ornamented with mother-of-pearl, named 'nascici', and silks of different textures and colours, not unlike those of Europe, together with a variety of woollen cloths. These people are all subjects of the Grand Khan. One of the towns, named Sindichin, is celebrated for the manufacture of all kinds of arms, and every article necessary for the equipment of troops. In the mountainous part of the province there is a place called Idifa, in which is a rich mine of silver, from whence large quantities of that metal are obtained. There are also plenty of birds and beasts.





*Guanyin of the Southern Sea*, Liao (907-1125)  
or Jin Dynasty (1115-1234). Wood with  
multiple layers of paint, 241.3 x 165.1 cm.  
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.

## **Book II.**

### **CHAPTER 31**

§ 1. In this Book it is our design to treat of all the great and admirable achievements of the Grand Khan now reigning, who is styled Kublai-Khan; the latter word implying in our language 'lord of lords', and with much propriety added to his name; in respect to number of subjects, extent of territory, and amount of revenue, he surpasses every sovereign that has heretofore been or that now is in the world, nor has any other been served with such implicit obedience by those whom he governs. This will so evidently appear in the course of our work, as to satisfy everyone of the truth of our assertion.

Kublai-Khan, it is to be understood, is the lineal and legitimate descendant of Jengiz-Khan the first Emperor, and the rightful sovereign of the Tartars. He is the sixth Grand Khan, and began his reign in 1256. He obtained the sovereignty by his consummate valour, his virtues, and his prudence, in opposition to the designs of his brothers, supported by many of the great officers and members of his own family. But the succession appertained to him by right.

It is forty-two years since he began to reign to the present year, 1288, and he is fully eighty-five years of age. Previously to his ascending the throne he had served as a volunteer in the army, and endeavoured to take a share in every enterprise. Not only was he brave and daring in action, but in point of judgment and military skill he was considered to be the most able and successful commander that ever led the Tartars to battle. From that period, however, he ceased to take the field in person, and entrusted the conduct of expeditions to his sons and his captains, excepting in one instance, the occasion of which was as follows. A certain chief named Nayan, who, although only thirty years of age, was kinsman to Kublai, had succeeded to the dominion of many cities and provinces, which enabled him to bring into the field an army of 400,000 horses. His predecessors, however, had been vassals of the Grand Khan. Actuated by youthful vanity upon finding himself at the head of so great a force, he formed, in 1286, the design of throwing off his allegiance, and usurping the sovereignty. With this view he privately dispatched messengers to Kaidu, another powerful chief, whose territories lay towards the Greater Turkey, and who, although a nephew of the Grand Khan, was in rebellion against him, and bore him determined ill-will, proceeding from the apprehension of punishment for former offences. To Kaidu, therefore, the propositions made by Nayan were highly satisfactory, and he accordingly promised to bring to his assistance an army of 100,000 horses. Both princes immediately began to assemble their forces, but it could not be effected so secretly as not to come to the knowledge of Kublai, who upon hearing of their preparations lost no time in occupying all the passes leading to the countries of Nayan and of Kaidu, in order to prevent them from having any information respecting the measures he was himself taking. He then

gave orders for collecting, with the utmost haste, the whole of the troops stationed within ten days' march of the city of Kambalu. These amounted to 360,000 horses, to which was added a body of 100,000 foot soldiers, consisting of those who were usually about his person, and principally his falconers and domestic servants. In the course of twenty days they were all in readiness. Had he assembled the armies kept up for the constant protection of the different provinces of Cathay, it must necessarily have required thirty or forty days, in which time the enemy would have gained information of his arrangements, and been enabled to effect their junction, and to occupy such strong positions as would best suit with their designs. His object was, by promptitude, which is ever the companion of victory, to anticipate the preparations of Nayan, and by falling upon him whilst single, destroy his power with more certainty and effect than after he should have been joined by Kaidu.



View of the Gobi Desert.

It may be proper here to observe, whilst on the subject of the armies of the Grand Khan, that in every province of Cathay and of Manji, as well as in other parts of his dominions, there were many disloyal and seditious persons, who at all times were disposed to break out in rebellion against their sovereign, and on this account it became necessary to keep armies in such of the provinces as contained large cities and an extensive population, which are stationed at the distance of four or five miles from those cities, and can enter them at their pleasure. These armies the Grand Khan makes it a practice to change every second year, and the same with respect to the officers who command them. By means of such precautions the people are kept in quiet subjection, and neither movement nor innovation of any kind can be attempted. The troops are maintained not only from the pay they receive out of the imperial revenues of the province, but also from the cattle and their milk, which belong to them individually, and which they send into the cities for sale, furnishing themselves from thence, in return, with those articles of which they stand in need. In this manner they are distributed over the country, in various places, to the distance of thirty, forty, and even sixty days' journey. If even the half of these corps were to be collected in one place, the statement of their number would appear marvellous and scarcely entitled to belief.

§ 2. Having formed his army in the manner above described, the Grand Khan proceeded towards the territory of Nayan, and by forced marches, continued day



and night, he reached it at the expiration of twenty-five days. So prudently, at the same time, was the expedition managed, that neither that prince himself nor any of his dependents were aware of it, all the roads being guarded in such a manner that no one who attempted to pass could escape being made prisoner. Upon arriving at a certain range of hills, on the other side of which was the plain where Nayan's army lay encamped, Kublai halted his troops, and allowed them two days of rest. During this interval he called upon his astrologers to ascertain by virtue of their art, and to declare in presence of the whole army, to which side the victory would incline. They pronounced that it would fall to the lot of Kublai. It has ever been the practice of the Grand Khans to have recourse to divination for the purpose of inspiring their men. Confident therefore of success, they ascended the hill with alacrity the next morning, and presented themselves before the army of Nayan, which they found negligently posted, without advanced parties or scouts, whilst the chief himself was asleep in his tent, accompanied by one of his wives. Upon awaking, he hastened to form his troops in the best manner that circumstances would allow, lamenting that his junction with Kaidu had not been sooner effected. Kublai took his station in a large wooden castle, borne on the backs of four elephants, whose bodies were protected with coverings of thick leather hardened by fire, over which were housings of cloth of gold. The castle contained many crossbowmen and archers, and on the top of it was hoisted the imperial standard, adorned with representations of the sun and moon. His army, which consisted of thirty horse battalions, each battalion containing 10,000 men, armed with bows, he disposed in three grand divisions, and those which formed the left and right wings he extended in such a manner as to out-flank the army of Nayan. In front of each horse battalion were placed 500 infantry, armed with short lances and swords, who, whenever the cavalry made a show of flight, were practised to mount behind the riders and accompany them, alighting again when they returned to the charge, and killing with their lances the horses of the enemy. As soon as the order of battle was arranged, an infinite number of wind instruments of various kinds were sounded, and these were succeeded by songs, according to the custom of the Tartars before they engage in fight, which commences upon the signal given by the cymbals and drums, and there was such a beating of the cymbals and drums, and such singing, that it was wonderful to hear. This signal, by the orders of the Grand Khan, was first given to the right and left wings, and then a fierce and bloody conflict began. The air was instantly filled with a cloud of arrows that poured down on every side, and vast numbers of men and horses were seen to fall to the ground. The loud cries and shouts of the men, together with the noise of the horses and the weapons, were such as to inspire terror into

those who heard them. When their arrows had been discharged, the hostile parties engaged in close combat with their lances, swords, and maces shod with iron; such was the slaughter, and so large were the heaps of the carcasses of men, and more especially of horses, on the field, that it became impossible for the one party to advance upon the other. Thus the fortune of the day remained for a long time undecided, and victory wavered between the contending parties from morning until noon; for so zealous was the devotion of Nayan's people to the cause of their master, who was most liberal and indulgent towards them, that they were all ready to meet death rather than turn their backs to the enemy. At length, however, Nayan, perceiving that he was nearly surrounded, attempted to save himself by flight, but was presently made prisoner and conducted to the presence of Kublai, who gave orders for his being put to death. This was carried into execution by enclosing him between two carpets, which were violently shaken until the spirit had departed from the body, the motive for this peculiar sentence being, that the sun and the air should not witness the shedding of the blood of one who belonged to the Imperial Family. Those of his troops who survived the battle came to make their submission, and swear allegiance to Kublai. They were inhabitants of the four noble provinces of Chorza, Karli, Barskol, and Sitingui.

Nayan, who had privately undergone the ceremony of baptism, but never made open profession of Christianity, thought proper, on this occasion, to bear the sign of the cross in his banners, and he had in his array a vast number of Christians, who were left amongst the slain. When the Jews and the Saracens perceived that the banner of the cross was overthrown, they taunted the Christian inhabitants with it, saying, "Behold the state to which your (vaunted) banners, and those who followed them, are reduced!" On account of these derisions the Christians were compelled to lay their complaints before the Grand Khan, who ordered the former to appear before him, and sharply rebuked them. "If the Cross of Christ," he said, "has not proved advantageous to the party of Nayan, the effect has been consistent with reason and justice, inasmuch as he was a rebel and a traitor to his Lord, and to such wretches it could not afford its protection. Let none therefore presume to charge with injustice the God of the Christians, who is Himself the perfection of goodness and of justice."



*Prince and Lady under  
Flowering Branch*, detail of a page from an  
album made for Prince Bahram Mirza, 1425-1450.  
Ink, gold, and colour on silk, mounted on paper,  
31.4 x 23.2 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Scene from the *Tale of the Goose*,  
6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century. Detail of the *Panjakent mural*.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.





*Offering Bearers, 7<sup>th</sup> century.*  
Fragment of the Ajina Tepe mural.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

## CHAPTER 32

The Grand Khan, having obtained this signal victory, returned with great pomp and triumph to the capital city of Kanbalu. This took place in the month of November, and he continued to reside there during the months of February and March, in the latter of which was our festival of Easter. Being aware that this was one of our principal solemnities, he commanded all the Christians to attend him, and to bring with them their Book, which contains the four Gospels of the Evangelists. After causing it to be repeatedly perfumed with incense, in a ceremonious manner, he devoutly kissed it, and directed that the same should be

done by all his nobles who were present. This was his usual practice upon each of the principal Christian festivals, such as Easter and Christmas, and he observed the same at the festivals of the Saracens, Jews, and idolaters. Upon being asked his motive for this conduct, he said:

“There are four great Prophets who are revered and worshipped by the different classes of mankind. The Christians regard Jesus Christ as their divinity; the Saracens, Mahomet; the Jews, Moses; and the idolaters, Sogomombar-kan, the most eminent amongst their idols. I do honour and show respect to all the four, and invoke to my aid whichever amongst them is in truth supreme in heaven.”

But from the manner in which His Majesty acted towards them, it is evident that he regarded the faith of the Christians as the truest and the best, nothing, as he observed, being enjoined to its professors that was not replete with virtue and holiness. By no means, however, would he permit them to bear the cross before them in their processions, because upon it so exalted a personage as Christ had been scourged and (ignominiously) put to death. It may perhaps be asked by some, why, if he showed such a preference to the faith of Christ, he did not conform to it, and become a Christian? His reason for not so doing, he assigned to Nicolo and Maffio Polo, when, upon the occasion of his sending them as his ambassadors to the Pope, they ventured to address a few words to him on the subject of Christianity.



*Dancer, Mogao Cave 217, 7<sup>th</sup> century.*  
Wall painting. Dunhuang (Gansu province, Lanzhou).

“Wherefore,” he asked, “should I become a Christian? You yourselves must perceive that the Christians of these countries are ignorant, inefficient persons, who do not possess the faculty of performing anything (miraculous); whereas you see that the idolaters can do whatever they will. When I sit at table the cups that were in the middle of the hall come to me filled with wine and other beverages, spontaneously and without being touched by human hand, and I drink from them. They have the power of controlling bad weather and obliging it to



retire to any quarter of the heavens, with many other wonderful gifts of that nature. You are witnesses that their idols have the faculty of speech, and predict to them whatever is required. Should I become a convert to the faith of Christ, and profess myself a Christian, the nobles of my court and other persons who do not incline to that religion will ask me what sufficient motives have caused me to receive baptism, and to embrace Christianity. ‘What extraordinary powers,’ they will say, ‘what miracles have been displayed by its ministers? Whereas the idolaters declare that what they exhibit is performed through their own sanctity, and the influence of their idols.’ To this I shall not know what answer to make, and I shall be considered by them as labouring under a grievous error; whilst the idolaters, who by means of their profound art can effect such wonders, may without difficulty compass my death. But return you to your Pontiff, and request of him, in my name, to send hither a hundred persons well-skilled in your law, who being confronted with the idolaters shall have power to coerce them, and showing that they themselves are endowed with similar art, but which they refrain from exercising, because it is derived from the agency of evil spirits, shall compel them to desist from practices of such a nature in their presence. When I am witness of this, I shall place them and their religion under an interdict, and shall allow myself to be baptised. Following my example, all my nobility will then in like manner receive baptism, and this will be imitated by my subjects in general, so that the Christians of these parts will exceed in number those who inhabit your own country.”

From this discourse it must be evident that if the Pope had sent out persons duly qualified to preach the gospel, the Grand Khan would have embraced Christianity, for which, it is certainly known, he had a strong predilection.





Mogao Cave 272, 5<sup>th</sup> century. Wall painting.  
Dunhuang (Gansu province, Lanzhou).



*A Chinese Dignitary, c. late 15<sup>th</sup> century.*  
Library of the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul.

## CHAPTER 33

Kublai, who is styled Grand Khan, or lord of lords, is of the middle stature, that is, neither tall nor short; his limbs are well formed, and in his whole figure there is a just proportion. His complexion is fair, and occasionally suffused with red, like the bright tint of the rose, which adds much grace to his countenance. His eyes are black and handsome; his nose is well shaped and prominent. He has four wives of the first rank, who are esteemed legitimate, and the eldest-born son

of any one of these succeeds to the Empire, upon the decease of the Grand Khan. They bear equally the title of Empress, and have their separate courts. None of them have fewer than 300 young female attendants of great beauty, together with a multitude of youths as pages, and other eunuchs, as well as ladies of the bedchamber; so that the number of persons belonging to each of their respective courts amounts to 10,000. When His Majesty is desirous of the company of one of his Empresses, he either sends for her, or goes himself to her palace. Besides these, he has many concubines provided for his use, from a province of Tartary named Ungut, having a city of the same name, the inhabitants of which are distinguished for beauty of features and fairness of complexion. Thither the Grand Khan sends his officers every second year, or oftener, as it may happen to be his pleasure, who collect for him, to the number of four or five hundred, or more, of the handsomest of the young women, according to the estimation of beauty communicated to them in their instructions. The mode of their appreciation is as follows. Upon the arrival of these commissioners, they give orders for assembling all the young women of the province, and appoint qualified persons to examine them, who, upon careful inspection of each of them separately, that is to say, of the hair, the countenance, the eyebrows, the mouth, the lips, and other features, as well as the symmetry of these with each other, estimate their value at sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, or twenty, or more carats, according to the greater or less degree of beauty. The number required by the Grand Khan, at the rates, perhaps, of twenty or twenty-one carats, to which their commission was limited, is then selected from the rest, and they are conveyed to his court. Upon their arrival in his presence, he causes a new examination to be made by a different set of inspectors, and from amongst them a further selection takes place, when thirty or forty are retained for his own chamber at a higher valuation. These, in the first instance, are committed separately to the care of the wives of certain of the nobles, whose duty it is to observe them attentively during the course of the night, in order to ascertain that they have not any concealed imperfections, that they sleep tranquilly, do not snore, have sweet breath, and are free from unpleasant scent in any part of the body. Having undergone this rigorous scrutiny, they are divided into parties of five, one of which parties attends during three days and three nights, in His Majesty's interior apartment, where they are to perform every service that is required of them, and he does with them as he likes. When this term is completed, they are relieved by another party, and in this manner successively, until the whole number have taken their turn, when the first five recommence their attendance. But whilst the one party officiates in the inner chamber, another is stationed in the outer apartment adjoining, in order that if His Majesty should have occasion

for anything, such as drink or victuals, the former may signify his commands to the latter, by whom the article required is immediately procured, and thus the duty of waiting upon His Majesty's person is exclusively performed by these young females. The remainder of them, whose value had been estimated at an inferior rate, are assigned to the different lords of the household, under whom they are instructed in cookery, in dressmaking, and other suitable works; upon any person belonging to the court expressing an inclination to take a wife, the Grand Khan bestows upon him one of these damsels, with a handsome portion. In this manner he provides for them all amongst his nobility. It may be asked whether the people of the province do not feel themselves aggrieved in having their daughters thus forcibly taken from them by the sovereign? Certainly not, but, on the contrary, they regard it as a favour and an honour done to them, and those who are the fathers of handsome children feel highly gratified by his condescending to make choice of their daughters. "If," say they, "my daughter is born under an auspicious planet and to good fortune, His Majesty can best fulfil her destinies, by matching her nobly, which it would not be in my power to do." If, on the other hand, the daughter misconducts herself, or any mischance befalls her (by which she becomes disqualified), the father attributes the disappointment to the malign influence of her stars.

## CHAPTER 34

Particular mention will hereafter be made of the establishment of a council of twelve persons, who had the power of disposing, at their pleasure, of the lands, the governments, and everything belonging to the state. Amongst these was a Saracen, named Achmac, a crafty and bold man, whose influence with the Grand Khan surpassed that of the other members. To such a degree was his master infatuated with him that he indulged him in every liberty. It was discovered, indeed, after his death, that he had by means of spells so fascinated His Majesty as to oblige him to give ear and credit to whatever he represented, and by these means was enabled to act in all matters according to his own arbitrary will. He gave away all the governments and public offices, pronounced judgment upon all offenders, and when he was disposed to sacrifice any man to whom he bore ill-will, he had only to go to the Emperor and say to him, "Such a person has committed an offence against your majesty, and is deserving of death", when the Emperor was accustomed to reply, "Do as you judge best", upon which he caused him to be immediately executed.

So evident were the proofs of the authority he possessed and of His Majesty's implicit faith in his representations, that none had the hardiness to contradict him



in any matter; nor was there a person, however high in rank or office, who did not stand in awe of him. If anyone was accused by him of capital crime, however anxious he might be to exculpate himself, he had not the means of refuting the charge, because he could not procure an advocate, none daring to oppose the will of Achmac. By these means he occasioned many to die unjustly. Besides this, there was no handsome female who became an object of his sensuality that he did not contrive to possess, taking her as a wife if she was unmarried, or otherwise compelling her to yield to his desires. When he obtained information of any man having a beautiful daughter, he dispatched his emissaries to the father of the girl, with instructions to say to him: "What are your views with regard to this handsome daughter of yours? You cannot do better than give her in marriage to the Lord Deputy or Vicegerent" (that is, to Achmac, for so they termed him, as implying that he was His Majesty's representative). "We shall prevail upon him to appoint you to such a government or to such an office for three years". Thus tempted, he is prevailed upon to part with his child, and the matter being so far arranged, Achmac repairs to the Emperor and informs His Majesty that a certain government is vacant, or that the period for which it is held will expire on such a day, and recommends the father as a person well qualified to perform the duties. To this His Majesty gives his consent, and the appointment is immediately carried into effect. By such means as these, either from the ambition of holding high offices or the apprehension of his power, he obtained the sacrifice of all the most beautiful young women, either under the denomination of wives, or as the slaves of his pleasure. He had sons to the number of twenty-five, who held the highest offices of the state, and some of them, availing themselves of the authority of their father, formed adulterous connexions, and committed many other unlawful and atrocious acts. Achmac had likewise accumulated great wealth, for every person who obtained an appointment found it necessary to make him a considerable present.



*Guanyin of the Southern Sea* (detail),  
Liao (907-1125) or Jin Dynasty (1115-1234).  
Wood with multiple layers of paint,  
241.3 x 165.1 cm. The Nelson-Atkins  
Museum of Art, Kansas City.



*Luohan* (arhat), Liao Dynasty (907-1125),  
c. 1000. Glazed stoneware, height: 104.8 cm.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Seated figure of a *luohan* (arhat),  
Liao Dynasty (907-1125). Lead-glazed stoneware,  
height: 103 cm. British Museum, London.





Sand dunes in the Gobi desert.

During a period of twenty-two years he exercised this uncontrolled sway. At length the natives of the country, that is, the Cathaians, no longer able to endure his multiplied acts of injustice or the flagrant wickedness committed against their families, held meetings in order to devise means of putting him to death and raising a rebellion against the government. Amongst the persons principally concerned in this plot was a Cathaian, named Chen-ku, a chief of 6,000 men, who, burning with resentment on account of the violation of his mother, his wife, and his daughter, proposed the measure to one of his countrymen, named Van-ku, who was at the head of 10,000 men, and recommended its being carried into

execution at the time when the Grand Khan, having completed his three months' residence in Kanbalu, had departed for his palace of Shan-du, and when his son Chingis also had retired to the place he was accustomed to visit at that season, because the charge of the city was then entrusted to Achmac, who communicated to his master whatever matters occurred during his absence, and received in return the signification of his pleasure. Van-ku and Chen-ku, having held this consultation together, imparted their designs to some of the leading persons of the Cathaians, and through them to their friends in many other cities. It was accordingly determined amongst them that, on a certain day, immediately upon their perceiving the signal of a fire, they should rise and put to death all those who wore beards, and should extend the signal to other places, in order that the same might be carried into effect throughout the country. The meaning of the distinction with regard to beards was this: whereas the Cathaians themselves are naturally beardless, the Tartars, the Saracens, and the Christians wear beards. It should be understood that the Grand Khan not having obtained the sovereignty of Cathay by any legal right, but only by force of arms, had no confidence in the inhabitants, and therefore bestowed all the provincial governments and magistracies upon Tartars, Saracens, Christians, and other foreigners, who belonged to his household, and in whom he could trust. In consequence of this, his government was universally hated by the natives, who found themselves treated as slaves by these Tartars, and still worse by the Saracens.

Their plans being thus arranged, Van-ku and Chen-ku contrived to enter the palace at night, where the former, taking his place on one of the royal seats, caused the apartment to be lighted up, and sent a messenger to Achmac, who resided in the old city, requiring his immediate attendance upon Chingis, the Emperor's son, who (he should say) had unexpectedly arrived that night. Achmac was much astonished at the intelligence, but, being greatly in awe of the prince, instantly obeyed. Upon passing the gate of the (new) city, he met a Tartar officer named Kogatai, the commandant of the guard of 12,000 men, who asked him where he was going at that late hour. He replied that he was proceeding to wait upon Chingis, of whose arrival he had just heard. "How is it possible," said the officer, "that he can have arrived in so secret a manner, that I should not have been aware of his approach in time to order a party of his guards to attend him?" In the meantime the two Cathaians felt assured that if they could but succeed in dispatching Achmac they had nothing further to apprehend. Upon his entering the palace and seeing so many lights burning, he made his prostrations before Van-ku, supposing him to be the prince, when Chen-ku, who stood there provided with a sword, severed his head from his body. Kogatai had stopped at

the door, but upon observing what had taken place, exclaimed that there was treason going forward, and instantly let fly an arrow at Van-ku as he sat upon the throne, which slew him. He then called to his men, who seized Chen-ku, and dispatched an order into the city, that every person found out of doors should be put to death. The Cathaians perceiving, however, that the Tartars had discovered the conspiracy, and being deprived of their leaders, one of whom was killed and the other a prisoner, kept within their houses and were unable to make the signals to the other towns, as had been concerted. Kogatai immediately sent messengers to the Grand Khan, with a circumstantial relation of all that had passed, who, in return, directed him to make a diligent investigation of the treason, and to punish, according to the degree of their guilt, those whom he should find to have been concerned. On the following day, Kogatai examined all the Cathaians, and upon such as were principals in the conspiracy he inflicted capital punishment. The same was done with respect to the other cities that were known to have participated in the guilt.

When the Grand Khan returned to Kanbalu, he was desirous of knowing the causes of what had happened, and then learned that the infamous Achmac and seven of his sons (for all were not equally culpable) had committed those enormities which have been described. He gave orders for removing the treasure which had been accumulated by the deceased to an incredible amount, from the place of his residence in the old city to the new, where it was deposited in his own treasury.



Relief carving of Dhritarashtra,  
Guardian of the East, on the inner wall  
of the Cloud Platform at Juyongguan,  
early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Great Wall of China,  
Changping District (Beijing).





Ming Tombs, 1409-1644. Beijing.



Pagoda of Tianning Temple, Liao Dynasty,  
c. 1100-1120. Brick and stone, height: 57.8 m.  
Guanganmen district (Beijing).

## CHAPTER 35

When His Majesty holds a grand and public court, those who attend it are seated in the following order. The table of the sovereign is placed before his elevated throne, and he takes his seat on the northern side, with his face turned towards the south, and next to him, on his left hand, sits the Empress. On his right hand, upon seats somewhat lower, are placed his sons, grandsons, and other persons

connected with him by blood, that is to say, who are descended from the imperial stock. The seat, however, of Chingis, his eldest son, is raised a little above those of his other sons, whose heads are nearly on a level with the feet of the Grand Khan. The other princes and the nobility have their places at still lower tables, and the same rules are observed with respect to the females, the wives of the sons, grandsons, and other relatives of the Grand Khan being seated on the left hand, at tables in like manner gradually lower; then follow the wives of the nobility and military officers, so that all are seated according to their respective ranks and dignities, in the places assigned to them, and to which they are entitled. The tables are arranged in such a manner that the Grand Khan, sitting on his elevated throne, can overlook the whole. It is not, however, to be understood that all who assemble on such occasions can be accommodated at tables. The greater part of the officers, and even of the nobles, on the contrary, eat, sitting upon carpets, in the hall; on the outside stand a great multitude of persons who come from different countries, and bring with them many rare and curious articles. Some of these are feudatories, who desire to be reinstated in possessions that have been taken from them, and who always make their appearance upon the appointed days of public festivity, or occasions of royal marriages.

In the middle of the hall, where the Grand Khan sits at table, there is a magnificent piece of furniture, made in the form of a square coffer, each side of which is three paces in length, exquisitely carved in figures of animals, and gilt. It is hollow within, for the purpose of receiving a capacious vase, shaped like a jar, and of precious materials, calculated to hold about a ton, and filled with wine. On each of its four sides stands a smaller vessel, containing about a hogshead, one of which is filled with mares' milk, another with that of the camel, and so of the others, according to the kinds of beverage in use. Within this buffet are also the cups or flagons belonging to His Majesty, for serving the liquors. Some of them are of beautiful gilt plate. Their size is such that, when filled with wine or other liquor, the quantity would be sufficient for eight or ten men. Before every two persons who have seats at the tables, one of these flagons is placed, together with a kind of ladle, in the form of a cup with a handle, also of plate, to be used not only for taking the wine out of the flagon, but for lifting it to the head. This is observed as well with respect to the women as the men. The quantity and richness of the plate belonging to His Majesty is quite incredible. Officers of rank are likewise appointed, whose duty it is to see that all strangers who happen to arrive at the time of the festival, and are unacquainted with the etiquette of the court, are suitably accommodated with places, and these stewards are continually visiting every part of the hall, inquiring of the guests if

there is anything which they are not provided with, or whether any of them wish for wine, milk, meat, or other articles, in which case it is immediately brought to them by the attendants.

At each door of the grand hall, or of whatever part the Grand Khan happens to be in, stand two officers, of a gigantic figure, one on each side, with staves in their hands, for the purpose of preventing persons from touching the threshold with their feet, and obliging them to step beyond it. If by chance anyone is guilty of this offence, these janitors take from him his garment, which he must redeem for money; or, when they do not take the garment, they inflict on him such number of blows as they have authority for doing. But, as strangers may be unacquainted with the prohibition, officers are appointed to introduce them, by whom they are warned of it; this precaution is used because touching the threshold is there regarded as a bad omen. In departing from the hall, as some of the company may be affected by the liquor, it is impossible to guard against the accident, and the order is not then strictly enforced. The numerous persons who attend at the sideboard of His Majesty, and who serve him with victuals and drink, are all obliged to cover their noses and mouths with handsome veils or cloths of worked silk, in order that his victuals or his wine may not be affected by their breath. When drink is called for by him, and the page in waiting has presented it, he retires three paces and kneels down, upon which the courtiers, and all who are present, in like manner make their prostration. At the same moment all the musical instruments, of which there is a numerous band, begin to play, and continue to do so until he has ceased drinking, when all the company recover their posture; this reverential salutation is made so often as His Majesty drinks. It is unnecessary to say anything of the victuals, because it may well be imagined that their abundance is excessive. When the repast is finished, and the tables have been removed, persons of various descriptions enter the hall, and amongst these a troop of comedians and performers on different instruments, as also tumblers and jugglers, who exhibit their skill in the presence of the Grand Khan, to the high amusement and gratification of all the spectators. When these sports are concluded, the people separate, and each returns to his own house.





The Gate of Supreme Harmony,  
15<sup>th</sup> century. Forbidden City, Beijing.

## CHAPTER 36

It is well ascertained that the Tartars date the commencement of their year from the month of February, and on that occasion it is customary for the Grand Khan, as well as all who are subject to him, in their several countries, to clothe themselves in white garments, which, according to their ideas, are the emblem of good fortune; they assume this dress at the beginning of the year, in the hope that, during the whole course of it, nothing but what is fortunate may happen to them, and that they may enjoy pleasure and comfort. Upon this day the inhabitants of all the provinces and kingdoms who hold lands or rights of jurisdiction under the Grand Khan, send him valuable presents of gold, silver, and precious stones, together with many pieces of white cloth, which they add, with the intent that His Majesty may experience throughout the year uninterrupted felicity, and possess treasures adequate to all his expenses. With the same view the nobles, princes, and all ranks of the community, make reciprocal presents, at their respective houses, of white articles, embracing each other with demonstrations of joy and festivity, and saying (as we ourselves are accustomed to do), “May good fortune attend you through the coming year, and may everything you undertake succeed to your wish”. On this occasion great numbers of beautiful white horses are presented to the Grand Khan; if not

perfectly white, it is at least the prevailing colour. In this country white horses are not uncommon.

It is, moreover, the custom in making presents to the Grand Khan, for those who have it in their power to furnish nine times nine of the article of which the present consists. Thus, for instance, if a province sends a present of horses, there are nine times nine, or eighty-one heads in the drove; so also of gold, or of cloth, nine times nine pieces. By such means His Majesty receives at this festival no fewer than 100,000 horses. On this day it is that all his elephants, amounting to 5,000, are exhibited in procession, covered with housings of cloth, fancifully and richly worked with gold and silk, in figures of birds and beasts. Each of these supports upon its shoulders two coffers filled with vessels of plate and other apparatus for the use of the court. Following is a train of camels, in like manner laden with various necessary articles of furniture. When the whole are properly arranged, they pass in review before His Majesty, and form a pleasing spectacle.

On the morning of the festival, before the tables are spread, all the princes, the nobility of various ranks, the cavaliers, astrologers, physicians, and falconers, with many others holding public offices, the prefects of the people and of the lands, together with the officers of the army, make their entry into the grand hall, in front of the Emperor. Those who cannot find room within, stand on the outside of the building, in such a situation as to be within sight of their sovereign. The assemblage is marshalled in the following order. The first places are assigned to the sons and grandsons of His Majesty and all the Imperial Family. Next to these are the provincial kings and the nobility of the Empire, according to their several degrees, in regular succession. When all have been disposed in the places appointed for them, a person of high dignity, or as we should express it, a great Prelate, rises and says with a loud voice: "Bow down and do reverence", when instantly all bend their bodies until their foreheads touch the floor. Again the Prelate cries: "God bless our Lord, and long preserve him in the enjoyment of felicity." To which the people answer: "God grant it." Once more the Prelate says: "May God increase the grandeur and prosperity of his Empire; may he preserve all those who are his subjects in the blessings of peace and contentment, and in all their lands may abundance prevail". The people again reply: "God grant it." They then make their prostrations four times. This being done, the Prelate advances to an altar, richly adorned, upon which is placed a red tablet inscribed with the name of the Grand Khan. Near to this stands a sensor of burning incense, with which the Prelate, on the behalf of all who are assembled, perfumes the tablet and the altar, in a reverential manner; when everyone present humbly prostrates himself before the tablet. This ceremony being concluded, they return to their places, and then make the

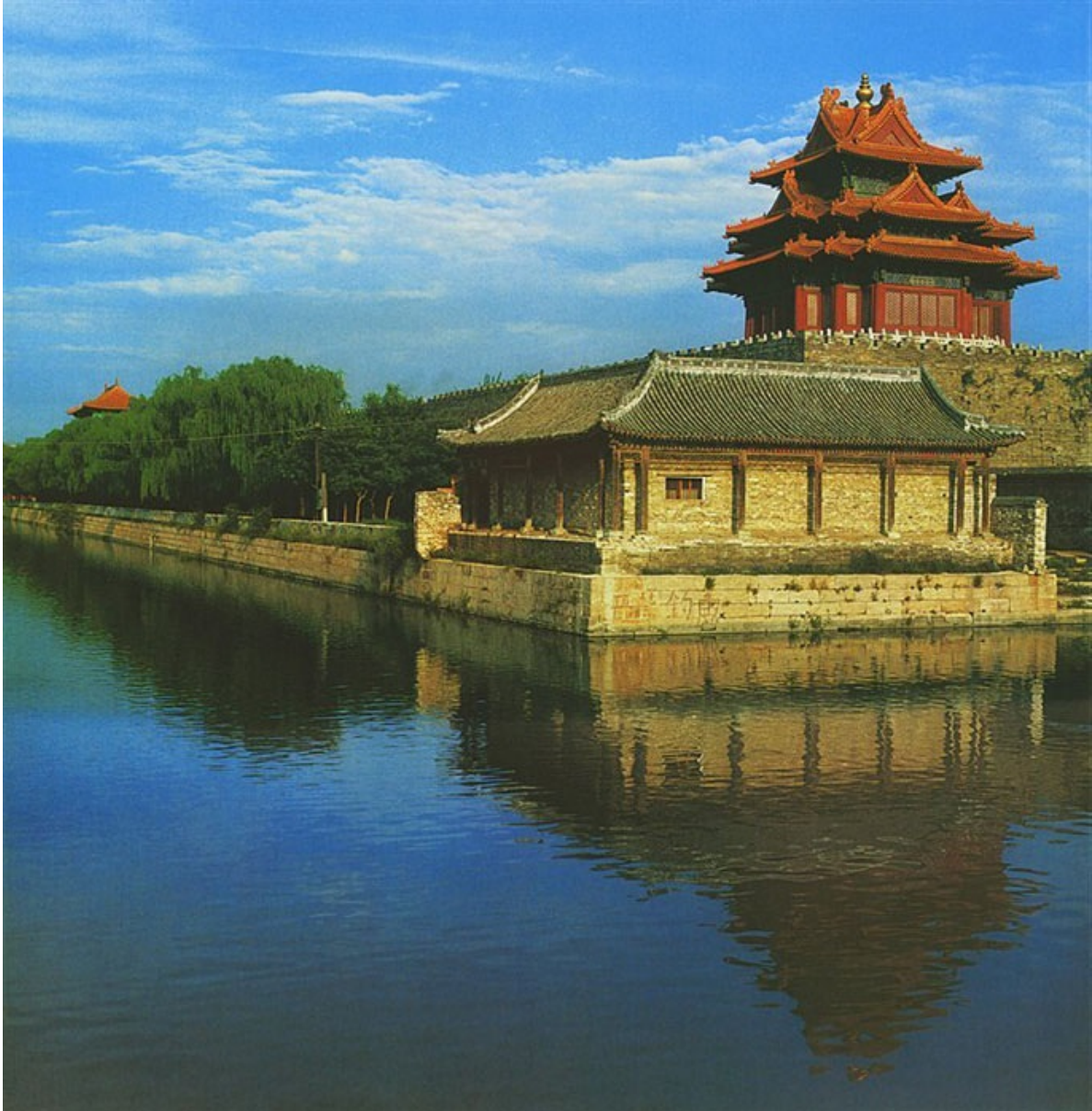
presentation of their respective gifts, such as have been mentioned. When a display has been made of these, and the Grand Khan has cast his eyes upon them, the tables are prepared for the feast, and the company, women as well as men, arrange themselves there in the manner and order described in a former chapter. Upon the removal of the victuals, the musicians and theatrical performers exhibit for the amusement of the court, as has been already related. But on this occasion a lion is conducted into the presence of His Majesty, so tame, that it is taught to lay itself down at his feet. The sports being finished, everyone returns to his own home.

## CHAPTER 37

When His Majesty has resided the usual time in the metropolis, and leaves it in the month of March, he proceeds in a north-easterly direction, to within two days' journey of the ocean, attended by a full 10,000 falconers, who carry with them a vast number of gerfalcons, peregrine falcons, and sakers, as well as many vultures, in order to pursue the game along the banks of the river. It must be understood that he does not keep all this body of men together in one place, but divides them into several parties of one or two hundred or more, who follow the sport in various directions, and the greater part of what they take is brought to His Majesty. He has likewise with him 10,000 men of those who are termed *taskaol* implying that their business is to be upon the watch, and, who, for this purpose, are detached in small parties of two or three to stations not far distant from each other, in such a manner as to encompass a considerable tract of country. Each of them is provided with a call and a hood, by which they are enabled, when necessary, to call in and to secure the birds. Upon the command being given for flying the hawks, those who let them loose are not under the necessity of following them, because the others, whose duty it is, look out so attentively that the birds cannot direct their flight to any quarter where they are not secured, or promptly assisted if there should be occasion. Every bird belonging to His Majesty, or to any of his nobles, has a small silver label fastened to its leg, on which is engraved the name of the owner and also the name of the keeper. In consequence of this precaution, as soon as the hawk is secured, it is immediately known to whom it belongs, and restored accordingly. If it happens that, although the name appears, the owner, not being personally known to the finder, cannot be ascertained in the first instance, the bird is, in that case, carried to an officer termed *bulangazi*, whose title imports that he is the "guardian of unclaimed property". Therefore, if a horse, a sword, a bird, or any other article is found, and it does not appear to whom it belongs, the finder

carries it directly to this officer, by whom it is received in charge and carefully preserved. If, on the other hand, a person finds any article that has been lost, and fails to carry it to the proper depositary, he is accounted a thief. Those by whom any property has been lost make their application to this officer, by whom it is restored to them. His situation is always in the most elevated part of the camp, and distinguished by a particular flag, in order that he may be the more readily found by such as have occasion to apply to him. The effect of this regulation is, that no articles are ultimately lost.





Corner watch tower on  
the wall of the inner Beijing palace,  
early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Forbidden City, Beijing.



Temple of Heaven, Hall of Prayer  
for Good Harvests, 1406-1420. Beijing.



National Library of China  
(formally known as the Imperial  
Wenyuange Library), 1406-1420.  
Imperial Palace (Forbidden City), Beijing.





Marco Polo Bridge (or Lugou Bridge), 1189-1192.  
Granite, 266.5 x 9.3 m. Fengtai district (Beijing).

When His Majesty makes his progress in this manner, towards the shores of the ocean, many interesting occurrences attend the sport, and it may truly be said that it is unrivalled by any other amusement in the world. On account of the narrowness of the passes in some parts of the country where the Grand Khan follows the chase, he is borne upon two elephants only, or sometimes a single one, being more convenient than a greater number; but under other circumstances he makes use of four, upon the backs of which is placed a pavilion of wood, handsomely carved, the inside being lined with cloth of gold, and the outside covered with the skins of lions, a mode of conveyance which is rendered necessary to him during his hunting excursions, in consequence of the gout with which he is troubled. In the pavilion he always carries with him twelve of his best gerfalcons, with twelve officers, from amongst his favourites, to bear him company and amuse him. Those who are on horseback by his side give him notice of the approach of cranes or other birds, upon which he raises the curtain of the pavilion, and when he espies the game, gives direction for letting fly the gerfalcons, which seize the cranes and overpower them after a long struggle. The view of this sport, as he lies upon his couch, affords extreme satisfaction to His Majesty, as well as to the officers who attend him, and to the horsemen by whom



he is surrounded. After having thus enjoyed the amusement for some hours, he repairs to a place named Kakzarmodin, where are pitched the pavilions and tents of his sons, and also of the nobles, the life-guards, and the falconers, exceeding 10,000 in number, and making a handsome appearance. The tent of His Majesty, in which he gives his audiences, is so long and wide that under it 10,000 soldiers might be drawn up, leaving room for the superior officers and other persons of rank. Its entrance fronts the south, and on the eastern side it has another tent connected with it, forming a spacious saloon, which the Emperor usually occupies, with a few of his nobility, and when he thinks proper to speak to any other person, they are introduced to him in that apartment. In the rear of this there is a large and handsome chamber, where he sleeps, and there are many other tents and apartments (for the different branches of the household), but which are not immediately connected with the great tent. These halls and chambers are all constructed and fitted up in the following manner. Each of them is supported by three pillars of wood, richly carved and gilt. The tents are covered on the outside with the skins of lions, streaked white, black, and red, and so well joined together that neither wind nor rain can penetrate. Inside they are lined with the skins of ermines and sables, which are the most costly of all furs, for the latter, if of a size to trim a dress, is valued at 2,000 *besants* of gold, provided it be perfect, but if otherwise, only 1,000. It is esteemed by Tartars the queen of furs. The animal, which in their language is named *rondes*, is about the size of a polecat. With these two kinds of skin, the halls as well as the sleeping-rooms are handsomely fitted up in compartments, arranged with much taste and skill. The tent-ropes, or cords by which they stretch the tents, are all of silk. Near to the grand tent of His Majesty are situated those of his ladies, also very handsome and splendid. They have in like manner their gerfalcons, their hawks, and other birds and beasts, with which they partake in the amusement. The number of persons collected in these encampments is quite incredible, and a spectator might conceive himself to be in the midst of a populous city, so great is the assemblage from every part of the Empire. The Grand Khan is attended on the occasion by the whole of his family and household; that is to say, his physicians, astronomers, falconers, and every other description of officer.

In these parts of the country he remains until the first vigil of our Easter, during which period he never ceases to frequent the lakes and rivers, where he takes storks, swans, herons, and a variety of other birds. His people, also being detached to several different places, procure for him a large quantity of game. In this manner, during the season of his diversion, he enjoys himself to a degree that no person who is not an eyewitness can conceive, the excellence and the extent of the sport being greater than it is possible to express. It is strictly

forbidden to every tradesman, mechanic, or husbandman throughout His Majesty's dominions, to keep a vulture, hawk, or any other bird used for the pursuit of game, or any sporting dog; nor is a nobleman or cavalier to presume to chase beast or bird in the neighbourhood of the place where His Majesty takes up his residence (the distance being limited to five miles, for example, on one side, ten on another, and perhaps fifteen in a third direction), unless his name be inscribed in a list kept by the grand falconer, or he has a special privilege to that effect. Beyond those limits it is permitted. There is an order, however, which prohibits every person throughout all the countries subject to the Grand Khan, whether prince, nobleman, or peasant, from daring to kill hares, roebucks, fallow deer, stags, or other animals of that kind, or any large birds, between the months of March and October, to the intent that they may increase and multiply; as the breach of this order is attended with punishment, game of every description increases prodigiously. When the usual time is elapsed, His Majesty returns to the capital by the road he went, continuing his sport during the whole of the journey.

## CHAPTER 38

In this city of Kanbalu is the mint of the Grand Khan, who may truly be said to possess the secret of the alchemists, as he has the art of producing money by the following process. He causes the bark to be stripped from those mulberry trees, the leaves of which are used for feeding silk-worms, and takes from it that thin inner rind which lies between the coarser bark and the wood of the tree. This being steeped, and afterwards pounded in a mortar, until reduced to a pulp, is made into paper, resembling (in substance) that which is manufactured from cotton, but quite black. When ready for use, he has it cut into pieces of money of different sizes, nearly square, but somewhat longer than they are wide. Of these, the smallest pass for a *denier tournois*; the next size for a Venetian silver groat; others for two, five, and ten groats; others for one, two, three, and as far as ten *besants* of gold. The coinage of this paper money is authenticated with as much form and ceremony as if it were actually of pure gold or silver, for to each note a number of officers, specially appointed, not only subscribe their names, but affix their signets also; when this has been regularly done by the whole of them, the principal officer, deputed by His Majesty, having dipped into vermilion the royal seal committed to his custody, stamps with it the piece of paper, so that the form of the seal tinged with the vermilion remains impressed upon it, by which it receives full authenticity as current money, and the act of counterfeiting it is punished as a capital offence. When thus coined in large quantities, this paper

currency is circulated in every part of the Grand Khan's dominions; furthermore, no one dares, at the peril of his life, refuse to accept it in payment. All his subjects receive it without hesitation, because, wherever their business may call them, they can dispose of it again in the purchase of merchandise they may have occasion for, such as pearls, jewels, gold, or silver. With it, in short, every article may be procured.

Several times in the course of the year, large caravans of merchants arrive with such articles as have just been mentioned, together with gold tissues, which they lay before the Grand Khan. He thereupon calls together twelve experienced and skilful persons, selected for this purpose, whom he commands to examine the articles with great care, and to fix the value at which they should be purchased. Upon the sum at which they have been thus conscientiously appraised he allows a reasonable profit, and immediately pays for them with this paper, to which the owners can have no objection, because, as has been observed, it answers the purpose of their own disbursements, and even though they should be inhabitants of a country where this kind of money is not current, they invest the amount in other articles of merchandise suited to their own markets. When any persons happen to be possessed of paper money which from long use has become damaged, they carry it to the mint, where, upon the payment of only three percent, they may receive fresh notes in exchange. Should any be desirous of procuring gold or silver for the purposes of manufacture, such as of drinking-cups, girdles, or other articles wrought of these metals, they in like manner apply at the mint, and for their paper obtain the bullion they require. All His Majesty's armies are paid with this currency, which is to them of the same value as if it were gold or silver. Upon these grounds, it may certainly be affirmed that the Grand Khan has a more extensive command of treasure than any other sovereign in the universe.



Imperial stele written by Emperor Qianlong  
(1735-1796) of Qian Dynasty.  
Marco Polo Bridge, Fengtai district (Beijing).





Yungang Grottos, late 5<sup>th</sup> century.  
Datong (Shanxi province).



Part of the Great Wall,  
Qinglong (Black Dragon) Gorge.  
Qinglong Gorge Scenic Area,  
Huairou District (China).

## CHAPTER 39

The Grand Khan sends every year his commissioners to ascertain whether any of his subjects have suffered in their crops of corn from unfavourable weather, from storms of wind or violent rains, or by locusts, worms, or any other plague; in such cases he not only refrains from exacting the usual tribute of that year, but furnishes them from his granaries with so much corn as is necessary for their

subsistence, as well as for sowing their land. With this view, in times of great plenty, he causes large purchases to be made of such kinds of grain as are most serviceable to them, which is stored in granaries provided for the purpose in the several provinces, and managed with such care as to ensure its keeping for three or four years without damage. It is his command that these granaries be always kept full, in order to provide against times of scarcity, and when, in such seasons, he disposes of the grain for money, he requires for four measures no more than the purchaser would pay for one measure in the market. In like manner where there has been a mortality of cattle in any district, he makes good the loss to the sufferers from those belonging to himself, which he has received as his tenth of produce in other provinces. All his thoughts, indeed, are directed to the important object of assisting the people whom he governs, that they may be enabled to live by their labour and improve their substance. We must not omit to notice a peculiarity of the Grand Khan, that where an accident has happened by lightning to any herd of cattle, flock of sheep, or other domestic animals, whether the property of one or more persons, and however large the herd may be, he does not demand the tenth of the increase of such cattle during three years; so also if a ship laden with merchandise has been struck by lightning, he does not collect from her any custom or share of her cargo, considering the accident as an ill omen. God, he says, has shown Himself to be displeased with the owner of the goods, and he is unwilling that property bearing the mark of divine wrath should enter his treasury.

## CHAPTER 40

The greater part of the inhabitants of the province of Cathay drink a sort of wine made from rice mixed with a variety of spices and drugs. This beverage, or wine as it may be termed, is so good and well-flavoured that they do not wish for better. It is clear, bright, and pleasant to the taste, and being (made) very hot, has the quality of inebriating sooner than any other.

Throughout this province there is found a sort of black stone, which they dig out of the mountains, where it runs in veins. When lit, it burns like charcoal, and retains the fire much better than wood, insomuch that it may be preserved during the night, and in the morning be found still burning. These stones do not flame, except a little when first lit, but during their ignition give out a considerable heat. It is true there is no scarcity of wood in the country, but the multitude of inhabitants is so immense, and their stoves and baths, which they are continually heating, so numerous, that the quantity could not supply the demand, for there is no person who does not frequent the warm bath at least three times in the week,

and during the winter daily, if it is in their power. Every man of rank or wealth has one in his house for his own use, and the stock of wood must soon prove inadequate to such consumption, whereas these stones may be had in the greatest abundance, and at a cheap rate.

## CHAPTER 41

As has already been observed, these people are idolaters, and for deities, each person has a tablet fixed up against a high part of the wall of his chamber, upon which is written a name, that serves to denote the high, celestial, and sublime God; to this they pay daily adoration, with incense burning. Lifting up their hands and then striking their faces against the floor three times, they implore from him the blessings of sound intellect and health of body, without any further petition. Below this, on the floor, they have a statue which they name Natigai, which they consider as the God of all terrestrial things or whatever is produced from the earth. They give him a wife and children, and worship him in a similar manner, burning incense, raising their hands, and bending to the floor. To him they pray for seasonable weather, abundant crops, increase of family, and the like. They believe the soul to be immortal, in this sense, that immediately upon the death of a man, it enters into another body, and that accordingly as he has acted virtuously or wickedly during his life, his future state will become, progressively, better or worse. If he be a poor man, and has conducted himself worthily and decently, he will be reborn, in the first instance, from the womb of a gentlewoman, and become, himself, a gentleman; next, from the womb of a lady of rank, and become a nobleman; thus continually ascending in the scale of existence until he be united to the divinity. But if, on the contrary, being the son of a gentleman, he has behaved unworthily, he will, in his next state, be a clown, and at length a dog, continually descending to a condition more vile than the preceding.

Their style of conversation is courteous; they salute each other politely, with countenances expressive of satisfaction, have an air of good breeding, and eat their victuals with particular cleanliness. To their parents they show the utmost reverence, but should it happen that a child acts disrespectfully to or neglects to assist his parents in their necessity, there is a public tribunal, whose especial duty it is to punish with severity the crime of filial ingratitude, when the circumstance is known. Malefactors guilty of various crimes, who are apprehended and thrown into prison, are executed by strangling, but such as remain till the expiration of three years, being the time appointed by His Majesty for a general gaol delivery, and are then liberated, have a mark imprinted upon

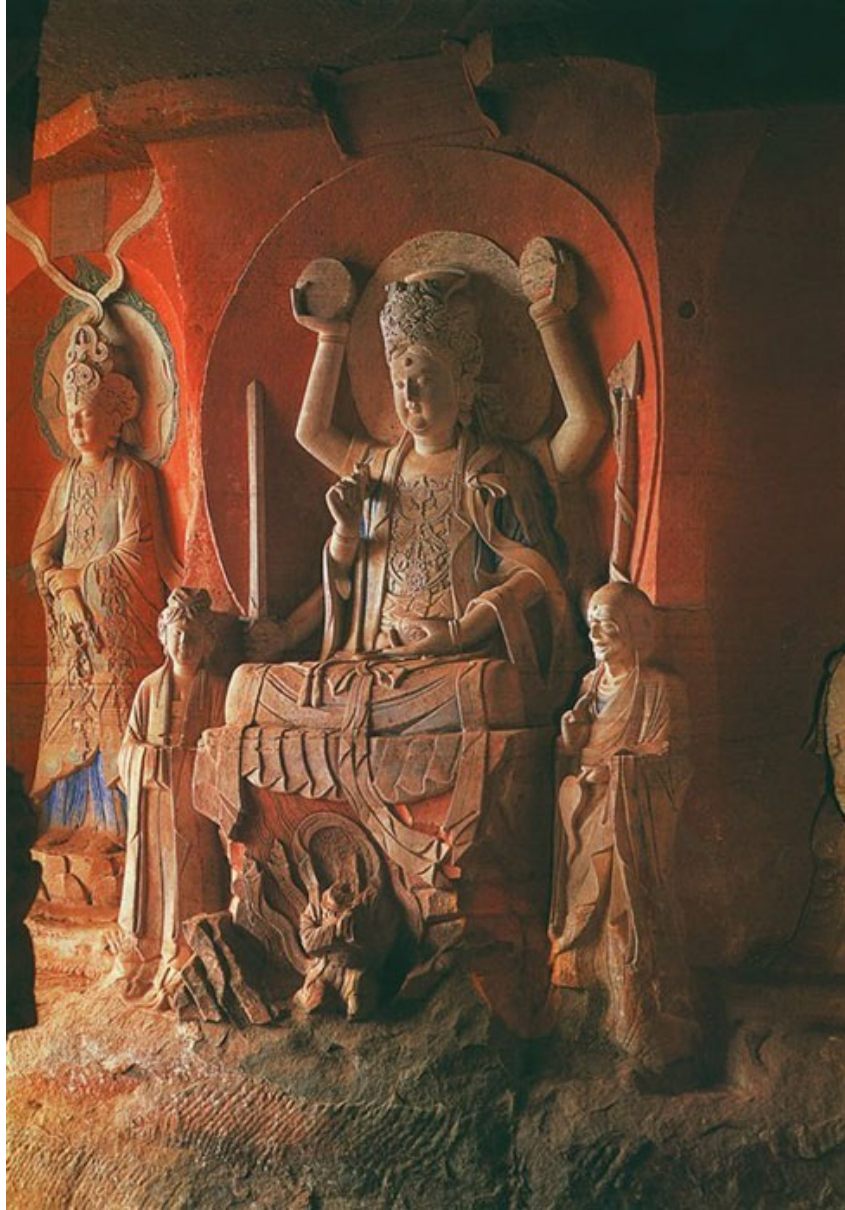


one of their cheeks, that they may be recognised.

The present Grand Khan has prohibited all species of gambling and other modes of cheating, to which the people of this country are addicted more than any others upon earth, and as an argument for deterring them from the practice, he says to them (in his edict), “I subdued you by the power of my sword, and consequently whatever you possess belongs of right to me; if you gamble, therefore, you are sporting with my property”. He does not, however, take anything arbitrarily in virtue of this right. The order and regularity observed by all ranks of people, when they present themselves before His Majesty, ought not to pass unnoticed. When they approach within half a mile of the place where he happens to be, they show their respect for his exalted character by assuming a humble, placid, and quiet demeanour, insomuch that not the least noise, nor the voice of any person calling out, or even speaking aloud, is heard. Every man of rank carries with him a small vessel, into which he spits, so long as he continues in the hall of audience, no one daring to spit on the floor; this being done, he replaces the cover, and makes a salutation. They are accustomed likewise to take with them handsome buskins made of white leather, and when they reach the court, but before they enter the hall (for which they await a summons from the Grand Khan), they put on these white buskins, and give those in which they had walked to the care of the servants. This practice is observed that they may not soil the beautiful carpets, which are curiously wrought with silk and gold, and exhibit a variety of colours.



*Figure of Avalokiteśvara, seated in position of a variant form of 'rājalīlāsana' (royal ease), 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century. Gilt bronze and gold, height: 28.7 cm. British Museum, London.*



*Seated six-armed Avalokiteśvara*  
(*Amoghapāṇa*, *Bukongjuansuo Guanyin*),  
South Song Dynasty, c. 1142-1146.  
Stone with pigments, height: 147 cm.  
Fowan Cave 136, Dazu District,  
Sichuan province (Chengdu).



*The bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Puxian),*  
South Song Dynasty, 1142-1146.  
Stone with pigments. Fowan Cave 136,  
Dazu District, Sichuan province (Chengdu).





*Probably Shakyamuni (Shijiamouni),  
the Historical Buddha, c. 700-800.*  
Carved marble with traces of paint and  
gilding, 76.2 x 36.2 cm. Los Angeles County  
Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

## CHAPTER 42

Having thus completed the account of the government and police of the province of Cathay and city of Kanbalu, as well as of the magnificence of the Grand Khan, we shall now proceed to speak of other parts of the empire. You must know then that the Grand Khan sent Marco as his ambassador to the west, and

leaving Kanbalu, he travelled westward during full four months; we shall now tell you all he saw going and coming.

Upon leaving the capital and travelling ten miles, you come to a river named Pulisangan, which discharges itself into the ocean, and is navigated by many vessels entering from thence, with considerable quantities of merchandise. Over this river there is a very handsome bridge of stone, perhaps unequalled by another in the world. Its length is 300 paces, and its width eight paces, so that ten men can, without inconvenience, ride abreast. It has twenty-four arches, supported by twenty-five piers erected in the water, all of serpentine stone, and built with great skill. On each side, and from one extremity to the other, there is a handsome parapet, formed of marble slabs and pillars arranged in a masterly style. At the commencement of the ascent the bridge is something wider than at the summit, but from the part where the ascent terminates, the sides run in straight lines and parallel to each other. Upon the upper level there is a massive and lofty column, resting upon a tortoise of marble, and having near its base a large figure of a lion, with a lion also on the top. Towards the slope of the bridge there is another handsome column or pillar, with its lion, at the distance of a pace and a half from the former. All the spaces between one pillar and another, throughout the whole length of the bridge, are filled up with slabs of marble, curiously sculpted, and mortised into the next adjoining pillars, which are, in like manner, a pace and a half asunder, and equally surmounted with lions, forming altogether a beautiful spectacle. These parapets serve to prevent accidents that might otherwise happen to passengers. What has been said applies to the descent as well as to the ascent of the bridge.

## CHAPTER 43

After having passed this bridge, proceeding thirty miles in a westerly direction, through a country abounding with fine buildings, amongst vineyards and much cultivated and fertile grounds, you arrive at a handsome and considerable city, named Gouza, where there are many convents of the idolaters. The inhabitants in general live by commerce and manual arts. They have manufactures of gold tissues and the finest kind of gauze. The inns for accommodating travellers are there numerous. At the distance of a mile beyond this place, the roads divide, the one going in a westerly, and the other in a south-easterly direction, the former through the province of Cathay, and the latter towards the province of Manji. From the city of Gouza it is a journey of ten days through Cathay to the kingdom of Ta-in-fu, in the course of which you pass many fine cities and strong places, in which manufactures and commerce flourish, and where you see many

vineyards and much cultivated land. From hence grapes are carried into the interior of Cathay, where the vine does not grow. Mulberry trees also abound, the leaves of which enable the inhabitants to produce large quantities of silk. A degree of civilisation prevails amongst all the people of this country, in consequence of their frequent intercourse with the towns, which are numerous and but little distance from each other. To these the merchants continually resort, carrying their goods from one city to another, as the fairs are successively held at each. At the end of five days' journey beyond the ten that have been mentioned, it is said there is another city still larger and more handsome (than Ta-in-fu), named Achbaluch, to which the limits of His Majesty's hunting grounds extend, and within which no person dares to sport, excepting the princes of his own family, and those whose names are inscribed on the grand falconer's list; beyond these limits, all people qualified by their rank are at liberty to pursue game. It happens, however, that the Grand Khan scarcely ever takes the amusement of the chase on this side of the country, and the consequence is that the wild animals, especially hares, multiply to such a degree as to occasion the destruction of all the growing corn of the province. When this came to the knowledge of the Grand Khan, he repaired thither, with the whole of his court, and innumerable multitudes of these animals were taken.



The Ancient city of Lijiang, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century.  
Lijiang (Yunnan province).

## CHAPTER 44

The city of Ken-zan-fu was anciently the capital of an extensive, noble, and powerful kingdom, the seat of many kings, highly descended and distinguished in arms. At the present day it is governed by a son of the Grand Khan, named Mangalu, upon whom his father has conferred the sovereignty. It is a country of great commerce, and eminent for its manufactures. Raw silk is produced in large quantities, and tissues of gold and every other kind of silk are woven there. At this place likewise they prepare every article necessary for the equipment of an army. All species of provisions are in abundance, and to be procured at a moderate price. The inhabitants in general worship idols, but there are some Christians, Turkomans, and Saracens. On a plain, about five miles from the city, stands a beautiful palace belonging to king Mangalu, embellished with many fountains and rivulets, both within and on the outside of the buildings. There is also a fine park, surrounded by a high wall, with battlements, enclosing an extent of five miles, where all kinds of wild animals, both beasts and birds, are kept for sport. In its centre is this spacious palace, which, for symmetry and beauty, cannot be surpassed. It contains many halls and chambers, ornamented with paintings in gold and the finest azure, as well as with great profusion of marble. Mangalu, pursuing the footsteps of his father, governs his principality with strict fairness, and is beloved by his people. He also takes much delight in hunting and hawking.



## CHAPTER 45

Travelling westward three days from the residence of Mangalu, you still find towns and castles whose inhabitants subsist by commerce and manufactures, and where there is an abundance of silk; but at the end of these three stages you enter upon a region of mountains and valleys, which lie within the province of Kun-kin. This tract, however, has no want of inhabitants, who are worshippers of idols, and cultivate the earth. They live also by the chase, the land being much covered with woods. In these are found many wild beasts, such as lions (tigers), bears, lynxes, fallow deer, antelopes, stags, and many other animals, which are made to turn to good account. This region extends to the distance of twenty days' journey, during which the way lies entirely over mountains and through valleys and woods, but still interspersed with towns where travellers may find convenient accommodation. This journey of twenty days towards the west being performed, you arrive at a place called Ach-baluch Manji, which signifies, the white city on the confines of Manji, where the country becomes level, and is very populous. The inhabitants live by trade and manual arts. Large quantities of ginger are produced here, which is conveyed through all the province of Cathay, with great advantage to the merchants. The country yields wheat, rice, and other grain plentifully, and at a reasonable rate. This plain, thickly covered with habitations, continues for two stages, after which you again come to high mountains, valleys, and forests. Travelling twenty days still further to the west, you continue to find the country inhabited, by people who worship idols, and subsist upon the produce of their soil, as well as that of the chase. Here also, besides the wild animals above enumerated, there are great numbers of that species which produce musk.

## CHAPTER 46

The province named Thebeth was laid entirely waste at the time that Mangu Khan carried his arms into that country. To the distance of twenty days' journey you see numerous towns and castles in a state of ruin, and in consequence of the want of inhabitants, wild beasts, and especially tigers, have multiplied to such a degree that merchants and other travellers are exposed there to great danger during the night. They are not only under the necessity of carrying their provisions along with them, but are obliged, upon arriving at their halting places, to employ the utmost circumspection, and to take the following precautions, that their horses may not be devoured. In this region, and particularly in the neighbourhood of rivers, are found canes (bamboos) of the length of ten paces, three palms in circumference, and three palms also in the space between each

knot or joint. Several of these, in their green state, the travellers tie together, and place them, when evening approaches, at a certain distance from their quarters, with a fire lighted around them, when, by the action of the heat, they burst with a tremendous explosion. The noise is so loud as to be heard at the distance of two miles, which has the effect of terrifying the wild beasts and making them fly from the neighbourhood. The merchants also provide themselves with iron shackles, in order to fasten the legs of their horses, which would otherwise, when alarmed by the noise, break their halters and run away; from the neglect of this precaution, it has happened that many owners have lost their cattle. Thus you travel for twenty days through a desolated country, finding neither inns nor provisions, unless perhaps once in three or four days, when you take the opportunity of replenishing your stock of necessaries. At the end of that period you begin to discover a few castles and strong towns, built upon rocky heights, or upon the summits of mountains, and gradually enter an inhabited and cultivated district, where there is no longer any danger from beasts of prey.



Wine vessel with pattern of dragons,  
14<sup>th</sup> century. Bronze, height: 23 cm.  
National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Xuanwu (black tortoise) statue,  
15<sup>th</sup> century. Gilded copper,  
63 x 44.5 x 47 cm. Hubei Provincial  
Museum, Wuhan City (Hubei province).

A scandalous custom, which could only proceed from the blindness of idolatry, prevails amongst the people of these parts, who are disinclined to marry young women so long as they are in their virgin state, but require, on the contrary, that they should have had previous commerce with many of the other sex; this, they assert, is pleasing to their deities, and a woman who has not had the company of men is worthless. Accordingly, upon the arrival of a caravan of merchants, as soon as they have set up their tents for the night, those mothers who have marriageable daughters conduct them to the place, and each, contending for a preference, entreats the strangers to accept of her daughter and enjoy her society so long as they remain in the neighbourhood. Such as have



most beauty to recommend them are of course chosen, and the others return home disappointed and chagrined, whilst the former continue with the travellers until the period of their departure. They then restore them to their mothers, and never attempt to carry them away. It is expected, however, that the merchants should make them presents of trinkets, rings, or other complimentary tokens of regard, which the young women take home with them. When, afterwards, they are designed for marriage, they wear all these ornaments about the neck or other part of the body, and she who exhibits the greatest number of them is considered to have attracted the attention of the greatest number of men, and is on that account in the higher estimation with the young men who are looking out for wives; nor can she bring to her husband a more acceptable portion than a quantity of such gifts. At the solemnisation of her nuptials, she accordingly makes a display of them to the assembly, and he regards them as a proof that their idols have rendered her lovely in the eyes of men. From thenceforward no person can dare to meddle with her who has become the wife of another, and this rule is never infringed. These idolatrous people are treacherous and cruel, and holding it no crime or turpitude to rob, are the greatest thieves in the world. They subsist by the chase and by fowling, as well as upon the fruits of the earth.

Here are found the animals that produce musk, and such is the quantity, that the scent of it is diffused over the whole country. Once in every month the secretion takes place, and it forms itself, as has already been said, into a sort of imposthume, or boil full of blood, near the navel, and the blood thus issuing, in consequence of excessive repletion, becomes the musk. Throughout every part of this region the animal abounds, and the odour generally prevails. They are called *gudderi* in the language of the natives, and are taken with dogs. These people use no coined money, nor even the paper money of the Grand Khan, but for their currency employ coral. Their dress is homely, being of leather, undressed skins, or of canvas. They have a language peculiar to the province of Thebeth, which borders on Manji. This was formerly a country of so much importance as to be divided into eight kingdoms, containing many cities and castles. Its rivers, lakes, and mountains are numerous. In the rivers gold-dust is found in very large quantities. Not only is the coral, before mentioned, used for money, but the women also wear it about their necks, and with it ornament their idols. There are manufactures of camlet and of gold cloth, and many drugs are produced in the country, which have not been brought to ours. These people are necromancers, and by their infernal art perform the most extraordinary and delusive enchantments that were ever seen or heard of. They cause tempests to arise, accompanied with flashes of lightning and thunderbolts, and produce many other miraculous effects. They are altogether an ill-conditioned race. They have

dogs of the size of asses, strong enough to hunt all sorts of wild beasts, particularly the wild oxen, which are called *beyamini*, and are extremely large and fierce. Some of the best laner falcons are bred here, and also sakers, very swift of flight, and the natives have good sport with them. This province of Thebeth is subject to the Grand Khan, as well as all the other kingdoms and provinces that have been mentioned.



*Bodhisattvas in main Longmen Grotto, Tang Dynasty,  
5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Limestone. In situ.*

## CHAPTER 47

In the province of Karazan the inhabitants are idolaters. The country belongs to the dominion of the Grand Khan, and the royal functions are exercised by his son, named Kogatin. Gold is found in the rivers, both in small particles and in lumps, and there are also veins of it in the mountains. In consequence of the large quantity obtained, they give a *saggio* of gold for six *saggi* of silver. As I have said before, these people never take virgins for their wives.

Here are seen huge serpents, ten paces in length, and ten spans in the girth of the body. At the fore part, near the head, they have two short legs, having three claws like those of a tiger, with eyes larger than a four-penny loaf (*pane da quattro denari*) and very glaring. The jaws are wide enough to swallow a man, the teeth are large and sharp, and their whole appearance is so formidable, that neither man, nor any kind of animal, can approach them without terror. Others are met with of a smaller size, being eight, six, or five paces long, and the following method is used for taking them. In the daytime, by reason of the great heat, they lurk in caverns, from whence, at night, they issue to seek their food, and whatever beast they meet with and can lay hold of, whether tiger, wolf, or any other, they devour, after which they drag themselves towards some lake,

spring of water, or river, in order to drink. By their motion in this way along the shore, and their vast weight, they make a deep impression, as if a heavy beam had been drawn along the sands. Those whose employment it is to hunt them observe the track by which they are most frequently accustomed to go, and fix into the ground several pieces of wood, armed with sharp iron spikes, which they cover with the sand in such a manner as not to be perceptible. When therefore the animals make their way towards the places they usually haunt, they are wounded by these instruments, and speedily killed. The crows, as soon as they perceive them to be dead, set up their scream; this serves as a signal to the hunters, who advance to the spot, and proceed to separate the skin from the flesh, taking care immediately to secure the gall, which is most highly esteemed in medicine. In cases of the bite of a mad dog, a pennyweight of it, dissolved in wine, is administered. It is also useful in accelerating parturition, when the labour pains of women have come on. A small quantity of it being applied to carbuncles, pustules, or other eruptions on the body, they are presently dispersed, and it is efficacious in many other complaints. The flesh of the animal is also sold at a dear rate, being thought to have a higher flavour than other kinds of meat, and by all persons it is esteemed a delicacy. In this province the horses are of a large size, and whilst young, are carried for sale to India. It is the practice to deprive them of one joint of the tail, in order to prevent them from lashing it from side to side, and to occasion its remaining pendent, as the whisking it about, in riding, appears to them a vile habit. These people ride with long stirrups, as the French do in our part of the world, whereas the Tartars, and almost all other people, wear them short, for the more conveniently using the bow, as they rise in their stirrups above the horse, when they shoot their arrows. They have complete armour of buffalo-leather, and carry lances, shields, and cross-bows. All their arrows are poisoned. I was assured, as a certain fact, that many persons, and especially those who harbour bad designs, always carry poison about them, with the intention of swallowing it in the event of their being apprehended for any delinquency, and exposed to the torture, that, rather than suffer it, they may affect their own destruction. But their rulers, who are aware of this practice, are always provided with the dung of dogs, which they oblige the accused to swallow immediately after, as it occasions their vomiting up the poison, and thus an antidote is ready against the arts of these wretches. Before the time of their becoming subject to the dominion of the Grand Khan, these people were addicted to the following brutal custom. When any stranger of superior quality, who united personal beauty with distinguished valour, happened to take up his abode at the house of one of them, he was murdered during the night; not for the sake of his money, but in order that the spirit of the



deceased, endowed with his accomplishments and intelligence, might remain with the family, and that through the efficacy of such an acquisition, all their concerns might prosper. Accordingly, the individual was accounted fortunate who possessed in this manner the soul of any noble personage, and many lost their lives in consequence. But from the time of His Majesty's beginning to rule the country, he has taken measures for suppressing the horrid practice, and from the effect of severe punishments that have been inflicted, it has ceased to exist.



Stone elephant at the tomb of Emperor Zhezong, 1085.  
Stone, height: 240 cm. Gongyi City (Henan province).



Ananda Temple, 1091-1105.  
Bagan (Pagan, Myanmar).

## CHAPTER 48

Proceeding five days' journey in a westerly direction from Karazan, you enter the province of Kardandan, belonging to the dominion of the Grand Khan, and of which the principal city is named Vochang. The currency of this country is gold by weight, and also the porcelain shells. An ounce of gold is exchanged for five ounces of silver, and a *saggio* of gold for five *saggi* of silver, there being no silver mines in this country, but much gold; consequently the merchants who

import silver obtain a large profit. Both the men and the women of this province have the custom of covering their teeth with thin plates of gold, which are fitted with great nicety to the shape of the teeth, and remain on them continually. The men also form dark stripes or bands round their arms and legs, by puncturing them in the following manner. They have five needles joined together, which they press into the flesh until blood is drawn; and they then rub the punctures with a black colouring matter, which leaves an indelible mark. To bear these dark stripes is considered as an ornamental and honourable distinction. They pay little attention to anything but horsemanship, the sports of the chase, and whatever belongs to the use of arms and a military life, leaving the entire management of their domestic concerns to their wives, who are assisted in their duties by slaves, either purchased or made prisoners in war.

These people have the following singular usage. As soon as a woman has been delivered of a child, and, rising from her bed, has washed and swathed the infant, her husband immediately takes the place she has left, has the child laid beside him, and nurses it for forty days. In the meantime, the friends and relations of the family pay to him their visits of congratulation, whilst the woman attends to the business of the house, carries victuals and drink to the husband in his bed, and suckles the infant at his side. These people eat their meat raw, or prepared in the manner that has been described, and along with it eat rice. Their wine is manufactured from rice, with a mixture of spices, and is a good beverage.

In this district they have neither temples nor idols, but pay their worship to the elder or ancestor of the family, from whom, they say, as they derive their existence, so to him they are indebted for all that they possess. They have no knowledge of any kind of writing, nor is this to be wondered at, considering the rude nature of the country, which is a mountainous tract, covered with the thickest forests. During the summer season, the atmosphere is so gloomy and unwholesome that merchants and other strangers are obliged to leave the district, in order to escape from death. When the natives have transactions of business with each other, which require them to execute any obligation for the amount of a debt or credit, their chief takes a square piece of wood, and divides it in two. Notches are then cut on it, denoting the sum in question, and each party receives one of the corresponding pieces, as is practised in respect to our tallies. Upon the expiration of the term, and payment made by the debtor, the creditor delivers up his counterpart, and both remain satisfied.





Shwedagon Pagoda, 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century (?).  
Yangon (Pagan, Myanmar).

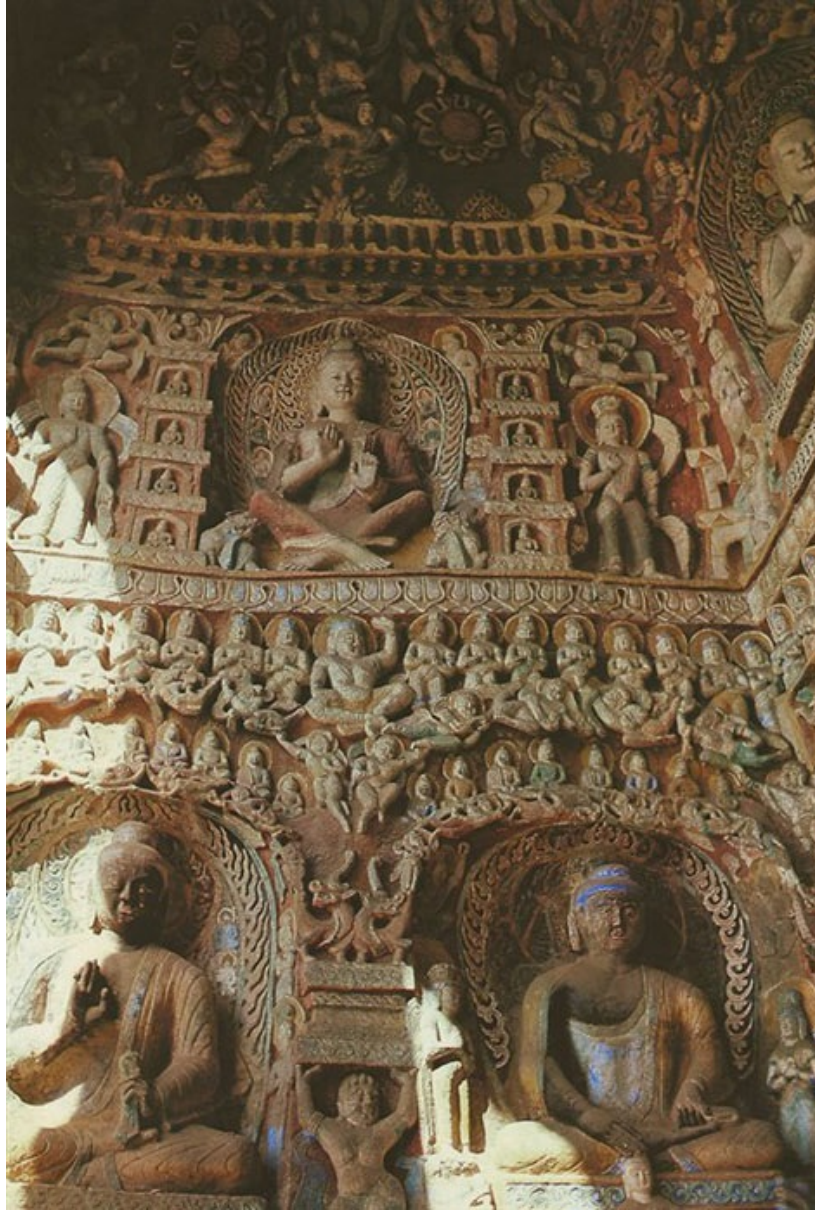
Neither in this province, nor in the cities of Kaindu, Vochang, or Yachi, are to be found persons professing the art of physic. When a person of consequence is attacked with a disorder, his family send for those sorcerers who offer sacrifices to the idols, to whom the sick person gives an account of the nature of his complaint. The sorcerers thereupon give directions for the attendance of persons who perform on a variety of loud instruments, in order that they may dance and sing hymns in honour and praise of their idols, and which they continue to do until the evil spirit has taken possession of one of them, when their musical exertions cease. They then inquire of the person so possessed the cause of the man's indisposition, and the means that should be used for effecting his cure. The evil spirit answers by the mouth of him into whose body he has entered, that the sickness has been occasioned by an offence given to a certain deity. Upon which the sorcerers address their prayers to that deity, beseeching him to pardon the sinner, on the condition that when cured he shall offer a sacrifice of his own blood. But if the demon perceives that there is no prospect of a recovery, he pronounces the deity to be so grievously offended that no sacrifice can appease him. If, on the contrary, he judges that a cure is likely to take place, he requires that an offering be made of so many sheep with black heads; that so many sorcerers, with their wives, be assembled, and that the sacrifice be performed by

their hands; by which means, he says, the favour of the deity may be conciliated. The relations comply immediately with all that has been demanded, the sheep are slain, their blood is sprinkled towards the heavens, the sorcerers (male and female) light up and perfume with incense the whole house of the sick person, making a smoke with wood of aloes. They cast into the air the water in which the flesh has been seethed, together with some of the liquor brewed with spices, and then laugh, sing, and dance about, with the idea of doing honour to their idol or divinity. They next inquire of the demoniac whether, by the sacrifice that has been made, the idol is satisfied, or if it is his command that another be yet performed. When the answer is that the propitiation has been satisfactory, the sorcerers of both sexes, who had not ceased their songs, thereupon seat themselves at the table, and proceed to feast on the meat that had been offered in sacrifice, and to drink the spiced liquor, of which a libation had been made, with signs of great hilarity. Having finished their meal, and received their fees, they return to their homes and if, through God's providence, the patient recovers, they attribute his cure to the idol for whom the sacrifice was performed; if he happens to die, they then declare that the rites had been rendered ineffective by those who dressed the victuals having presumed to taste them before the deity's portion had been presented to him. It must be understood that ceremonies of this kind are not practised upon the illness of every individual, but only perhaps once or twice in the course of a month, for noble or wealthy personages. They are common, however, to all the idolatrous inhabitants of the whole provinces of Cathay and Manji, amongst whom a physician is a rare character. And thus do the demons sport with the blindness of these deluded and wretched people.

## CHAPTER 49

The province of Manji is the most magnificent and the richest that is known in the Eastern World. About the year 1269 it was subject to a prince who was styled Facfur, and who surpassed in power and wealth any other that for a century had reigned in that country. His disposition was placatory, and his actions benevolent. So much was he beloved by his people, and such the strength of his kingdom, enclosed by rivers of the largest size, that his being molested by any power upon earth was regarded as an impossible event. The effect of this opinion was that he neither paid any attention himself to military affairs, nor encouraged his people to become acquainted with military exercises. The cities of his dominions were remarkably well fortified, being surrounded by deep ditches, a bow-shot in width, and full of water. He did not keep up any force in cavalry, because he was not apprehensive of attack. The means of increasing his

enjoyments and multiplying his pleasures were the chief employment of his thoughts. He maintained at his court, and kept near his person, about 1,000 beautiful women, in whose society he took delight. He was a friend to peace and to justice, which he administered strictly. The smallest act of oppression, or injury of any kind, committed by one man against another, was punished in an exemplary manner, without respect of persons. Such indeed was the impression of his justice, that when shops filled with goods happened, through the negligence of the owners, to be left open, no person dared to enter them, or to rob them of the smallest article. Travellers of all descriptions might pass through every part of the kingdom, by night as well as by day, freely and without apprehension of danger. He was religious, and charitable to the poor and needy. Children whom their wretched mothers exposed in consequence of their inability to rear them he caused to be saved and taken care of, to the number of 20,000 annually. When the boys attained a sufficient age, he had them instructed in some handicraft, and afterwards married them to young women who were brought up in the same manner.



*Seated bodhisattva*, early 6<sup>th</sup> century.  
Clay stone with traces of polychromy. In situ.





*The bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Song Dynasty, c. 1100-1200.*

Painted wood, 132.1 x 106.7 x 63.5 cm. The Avery  
Brundage Collection, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.



*Standing bodhisattva,*  
Jin Dynasty (1115-1234).  
Wood with polychrome and gilding,  
height: 190.5 cm. The Nelson-Atkins  
Museum of Art, Kansas City.



*Seated bodhisattva Târâ in her "Green Manifestation",*  
Ming Dynasty, 15<sup>th</sup> century. Gilt bronze with  
an inscription reading "Da Ming Yonglenian shi",  
17.7 x 11 x 9 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Museum,  
Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge (Massachusetts).

Very different from the temper and habits of Facfur were those of Kublai-Khan, Emperor of the Tartars, whose whole delight consisted in thoughts of a warlike nature, of the conquest of countries, and of extending his renown. After having annexed to his dominions a number of provinces and kingdoms, he now directed his views to the subduing that of Manji, and for this purpose assembled

a numerous army of horse and foot, the command of which he gave to a general named Chin-san Bay-an, which signifies in our language, the “Hundred-eyed”. This occurred in 1273. A number of vessels were put under his orders, with which he proceeded to the invasion of Manji. Upon landing there, he immediately summoned the inhabitants of the city of Koi-gan-zu to surrender to the authority of his sovereign. Upon their refusal to comply, instead of giving orders for an assault, he advanced to the next city, and when he there received a similar answer, proceeded to a third and a fourth, with the same result. Deeming it no longer prudent to leave so many cities in his rear, whilst not only his army was strong, but he expected to be soon joined by another of equal force, which the Grand Khan was to send to him from the interior, he resolved upon the attack of one of these cities; having, by great exertions and consummate skill, succeeded in carrying the place, he put every individual found in it to the sword. As soon as the intelligence of this event reached the other cities, it struck their inhabitants with such consternation and terror, that of their own accord they hastened to declare their submission. This being effected, he advanced, with the united force of his two armies, against the royal city of Kinsai, the residence of King Facfur, who felt all the agitation and dread of a person who had never seen a battle, nor been engaged in any sort of warfare. Alarmed for the safety of his person, he made his escape to a fleet of vessels that lay in readiness for the purpose, and embarking all his treasure and valuable effects, left the charge of the city to his Queen, with directions for its being defended to the utmost, feeling assured that her sex would be a protection to her, in the event of her falling into the hands of the enemy. He from thence proceeded to sea, and reaching certain islands, where were some strongly fortified posts, he continued there until his death. After the Queen had been left in the manner related, it is said to have come to her knowledge that the King had been told by his astrologers that he could never be deprived of his sovereignty by any other than a chief who should have a hundred eyes. On the strength of this declaration she felt confident, notwithstanding that the city became daily more and more straitened, that it could not be lost, because it seemed a thing impossible that any mortal could have that number of eyes. Inquiring, however, the name of the general who commanded the enemy’s troops, and being told it was Chin-san Bay-an, which means a hundred eyes, she was seized with horror at hearing it pronounced, as she felt a conviction that this must be the person who, according to the saying of the astrologers, might drive her husband from his throne. Overcome by womanish fear, she no longer attempted to make resistance, but immediately surrendered. Being thus in possession of the capital, the Tartars soon brought the remainder of the province under their subjection. The Queen was sent to the



presence of Kublai-Khan, where she was honourably received by him, and an allowance was by his orders assigned, that enabled her to support the dignity of her rank.



**Zhougant** (attributed to), *Young Maids with Flowers in Their Hair* (detail), middle of the Tang Dynasty. Handscroll painted in colour on silk, 180 x 46 cm. Liaoning Provincial Museum, Shenyang City.

## CHAPTER 50

The city named Tin-gui is not of any great size, but plentifully furnished with all the necessities of life. The people are idolaters, the subjects of the Grand Khan, and use his paper money. They are merchants, and have many trading vessels. Both beasts and birds are here found in plenty. The situation of this city is towards the south-east, and on the left-hand – that is, on the eastern side of it, at the distance of three days' journey – you find the sea. In the intermediate space there are many saltworks, where large quantities of salt are manufactured. You next come to the large and well-built town of Chin-gui, from whence salt is exported sufficient for the supply of all the neighbouring provinces. On this article the Grand Khan raises revenue, the amount of which would scarcely be credited. Here also the inhabitants worship idols, use paper money, and are the subjects of His Majesty.

## CHAPTER 51

Proceeding in a south-easterly direction from Chin-gui, you come to the important city of Yan-gui, which, having twenty-four towns under its jurisdiction, must be considered as a place of great consequence. It belongs to the dominion of the Grand Khan. The people are idolaters, and subsist by trade and manual arts. They manufacture arms and all sorts of warlike accoutrements, in consequence of which many troops are stationed in this part of the country. The city is the place of residence of one of the twelve nobles before spoken of, who are appointed by His Majesty to the government of the provinces, and in the room of one of these, Marco Polo, by special order of the Grand Khan, acted as governor of this city during the space of three years.

## CHAPTER 52

Sa-yan-fu is a considerable city of the province of Manji, having under its jurisdiction twelve wealthy and large towns. It is a place of great commerce and extensive manufactures. The inhabitants burn the bodies of their dead, and are idolaters. They are the subjects of the Grand Khan, and use his paper currency. Raw silk is there produced in great quantity, and the finest silks, intermixed with gold, are woven. Game of all kinds abounds. The place is amply furnished with everything that belongs to a great city, and by its uncommon strength it was enabled to stand a siege of three years, refusing to surrender to the Grand Khan even after he had obtained possession of the province of Manji. The difficulties experienced in the reduction of it were chiefly occasioned by the army's not being able to approach it, excepting on the northern side, the others being surrounded with water, by means of which the place continually received supplies, which it was not in the power of the besiegers to prevent. When the operations were reported to His Majesty, he felt extremely hurt that this place alone should obstinately hold out, after all the rest of the country had been reduced to obedience. The circumstance having come to the knowledge of the brothers Nicolo and Maffeo, who were then resident at the Imperial Court, they immediately presented themselves to the Grand Khan, and proposed to him that they should be allowed to construct machines, such as were made use of in the West, capable of throwing stones of 300 pounds weight, by which the buildings of the city might be destroyed and the inhabitants killed. Their memorial was attended to by the Grand Khan, who, warmly approving of the scheme, gave orders that the ablest smiths and carpenters should be placed under their direction, amongst whom were some Nestorian Christians, who proved to be most able mechanics. In a few days they completed their mangonels, according

to the instructions furnished by the two brothers, and a trial being made of them in the presence of the Grand Khan, and of his whole court, an opportunity was afforded of seeing them cast stones, each of which weighed 300 pounds. They were then put on board vessels, and conveyed to the army. When set up in front of the city of Sa-yan-fu, the first stone projected by one of them fell with such weight and violence upon a building that a great part of it was crushed, and fell to the ground. So terrified were the inhabitants by this mischief, which to them seemed to be the effect of a thunderbolt from heaven, which they immediately deliberated upon the expediency of surrendering. Persons authorised to treat were accordingly sent from the place, and their submission was accepted on the same terms and conditions as had been granted to the rest of the province. This prompt result of their ingenuity increased the reputation and credit of these two Venetian brothers in the opinion of the Grand Khan and of all his courtiers.





Xi'an city wall of the old Tang imperial city,  
1370-1378. Qian (Xi'an, Shaanxi province).



**Hui Zong**, *Spring Ride Guo Guo* (detail),  
Northern Song Dynasty. Handscroll  
painted in colour on silk, 148.7 x 52 cm.  
Liaoning Provincial Museum, Shenyang City.





*Women Observing Birds and Cicada*, Tang Dynasty,  
beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Painting from the  
tomb of Crown Prince Zhanghuai, 175 x 168 cm.  
Shaanxi History Museum, Xi'an.

## CHAPTER 53

The city of Tin-gui-gui is large and handsome, and produces much raw silk, of which tissues of various qualities and patterns are woven. The necessities of life are here in plenty, and the variety of game affords excellent sport. The inhabitants were a vile, inhuman race. At the time that Chin-san Bay-an, or the hundred-eyed, subdued the country of Manji, he dispatched certain Alanian

Christians, along with a party of his own people, to possess themselves of this city, who, as soon as they appeared before it, were suffered to enter without resistance. The place being surrounded by a double wall, one of them within the other, the Alanians occupied the first enclosure, where they found a large quantity of wine; having previously suffered much from fatigue and privation, they were eager to quench their thirst and, without any consideration, proceeded to drink to such excess that, becoming intoxicated, they fell asleep. The people of the city, who were within the second enclosure, as soon as they perceived that their enemies lay slumbering on the ground, took the opportunity of murdering them, not suffering one to escape. When Chin-san Bay-an learned the fate of his detachment, his indignation and anger were raised to the highest pitch, and he sent another army to attack the place. When it was carried, he gave orders for putting to the sword all the inhabitants, great and small, without distinction of sex as an act of retaliation.

## CHAPTER 54

The name of the noble and magnificent city of Kin-sai signifies ‘the celestial city,’ and which it merits from its pre-eminence to all others in the world, in point of grandeur and beauty, as well as from its abundant delights, which might lead an inhabitant to imagine himself in paradise. This city was frequently visited by Marco Polo, who carefully and diligently observed and inquired into every circumstance respecting it, all of which he entered in his notes, from whence the following particulars are briefly stated. According to common estimation, this city is a hundred miles in circuit. Its streets and canals are extensive, and there are squares, or marketplaces, which, being necessarily proportioned in size to the prodigious concourse of people by whom they are frequented, are exceedingly spacious. It is situated between a lake of fresh and very clear water on the one side, and a river of great magnitude on the other, the waters of which, by a number of canals, large and small, are made to run through every quarter of the city, carrying with them all the filth into the lake, and ultimately to the sea. This, whilst it contributes much to the purity of the air, furnishes a communication by water, in addition to that by land, to all parts of the town, the canals and the streets being of sufficient width to allow of boats on the one, and carriages in the other, conveniently passing, with articles necessary for the consumption of the inhabitants.

Each of the ten market squares is surrounded with high dwelling-houses, in the lower part of which are shops, where every kind of manufacture is carried on, and every article of trade is sold, such, amongst others, as spices, drugs,



trinkets, and pearls. In certain shops nothing is vended but the wine of the country, which they are continually brewing, and serve out fresh to their customers at a moderate price. The streets connected with the market squares are numerous, and in some of them are many cold baths, attended by servants of both sexes, to perform the offices of ablution for the men and women who frequent them, and who from their childhood have been accustomed at all times to wash in cold water, which they reckon highly conducive to health. At these bathing places, however, they have apartments provided with warm water, for the use of strangers, who, from not being habituated to it, cannot bear the shock of the cold. All are in the daily practice of washing their persons, and especially before their meals.

In other streets are the habitations of the courtesans, who are here in such numbers as I dare not venture to report, and not only near the squares, which is the situation usually appropriated for their residence, but in every part of the city they are to be found, adorned with much finery, highly perfumed, occupying well-furnished houses, and attended by many female domestics. These women are accomplished, and are perfect in the arts of allurements and dalliance, which they accompany with expressions adapted to every description of person, insomuch that strangers who have once tasted of their charms remain in a state of fascination, and become so enchanted by their meretricious arts that they can never divest themselves of the impression. Thus intoxicated with sensual pleasures, when they return to their homes they report that they have been in Kin-sai, or the celestial city, and pant for the time when they may be enabled to revisit paradise. In other streets are the dwellings of the physicians and the astrologers, who also give instructions in reading and writing, as well as in many other arts.

The inhabitants of the city are idolaters, and they use paper money as currency. The men as well as the women have fair complexions, and are handsome. The greater part of them are always clothed in silk, in consequence of the vast quantity of that material produced in the territory of Kin-sai, exclusive of that which the merchants import from other provinces. Amongst the handicraft trades exercised in the place, there are twelve considered to be superior to the rest, as being more generally useful, for each of which there are 1,000 workshops, and each shop furnishes employment for ten, fifteen, or twenty workmen, and in a few instances as many as forty, under their respective masters. The opulent principals in these manufactories do not labour with their own hands, but, on the contrary, assume airs of gentility and affect parade. Their wives equally abstain from work. They have much beauty, as has been remarked, and are brought up with delicate and languid habits. The costliness of

their dresses, in silks and jewellery, can scarcely be imagined. Although the laws of their ancient kings ordained that each citizen should exercise the profession of his father, they were allowed, when they acquired wealth, to discontinue the manual labour, provided they kept up the establishment, and employed persons to work at their paternal trades. Their houses are well built and richly adorned with carved work. So much do they delight in ornaments of this kind, in paintings and fancy buildings, that the sums they lavish on such objects are enormous.

On the borders of the lake are many handsome and spacious edifices belonging to men of rank and great magistrates. There are likewise many idol temples, with their monasteries, occupied by a number of monks, who perform the service of the idols. Near the central part are two islands, upon each of which stands a superb building, with an incredible number of apartments and separate pavilions. When the inhabitants of the city have occasion to celebrate a wedding, or to give a sumptuous entertainment, they resort to one of these islands, where they find ready for their purpose every article that can be required, such as vessels, napkins, table-linen, and the like, which are provided and kept there at the common expense of the citizens, by whom also the buildings were erected. It may happen that at one time there are a hundred parties assembled there, at weddings or other feasts, all of whom, notwithstanding, are accommodated with separate rooms or pavilions, so judiciously arranged that they do not interfere with or incommode each other.

It is the custom of the people of Kin-sai, upon the birth of a child, for the parents to make a note, immediately, of the day, hour, and minute at which the delivery took place. They then inquire of an astrologer under what sign or aspect of the heavens the child was born, and his answer is likewise committed carefully to writing. When therefore he is grown up, and is about to engage in any mercantile adventure, voyage, or treaty of marriage, this document is carried to the astrologer, who, having examined it, and weighed all the circumstances, pronounces certain oracular words, in which these people, who sometimes find them justified by the event, place great confidence. Of these astrologers, or rather magicians, great numbers are to be met with in every marketplace, and no marriage is ever celebrated until an opinion has been pronounced upon it by one of that profession.

It is also their custom, upon the death of any great and rich personage, to observe the following ceremonies. The relations, male and female, clothe themselves in coarse dresses, and accompany the body to the place appointed for burning it. The procession is likewise attended by performers on various musical instruments, which are sounded as it moves along, and prayers to their idols are

chanted in a loud voice. When arrived at the spot, they throw into the flame many pieces of cotton-paper, upon which are painted representations of male and female servants, horses, camels, silk wrought with gold, as well as of gold and silver money. This is done in consequence of their belief that the deceased will possess in the other world all these conveniences, the former in their natural state of flesh and bones, together with the money and the silks. As soon as the pile has been consumed, they sound all the instruments of music at the same time, producing a loud and long-continued noise, and they imagine that by these ceremonies their idols are induced to receive the soul of the man whose corpse has been reduced to ashes, in order to its being regenerated in the other world, and entering again into life.

Marco Polo, happening to be in the city of Kin-sai at the time of making the annual report to His Majesty's commissioners of the amount of revenue and the number of inhabitants, had an opportunity of observing that the latter were registered at 160 *tomans* of fire-places, that is to say, of families dwelling under the same roof; and as a *toman* is 10,000, it follows that the whole city must have contained 1,600,000 families, amongst which multitude of people there was only one church of Nestorian Christians. Every father of a family, or housekeeper, is required to affix a writing to the door of his house, specifying the name of each individual of his family, whether male or female, as well as the number of his horses. When any person dies, or leaves the dwelling, the name is struck out, and upon the occasion of a birth, it is added to the list. By these means the great officers of the province and governors of the cities are at all times acquainted with the exact number of the inhabitants. The same regulation is observed throughout the province of Cathay as well as of Manji. In like manner, all the keepers of inns and public hotels inscribe in a book the names of those who take up their occasional abode with them, particularising the day and the hour of their arrival and departure, a copy of which is transmitted daily to those magistrates who have been spoken of as stationed in the marketsquares. It is a custom in the province of Manji, with the indigent class of the people, who are unable to support their families, to sell their children to the rich, in order that they may be fed and brought up in a better manner than their own poverty would admit.



**Zhou Wenju** (after a work attributed to),  
*Ladies of the Court*, detail of the handscroll  
*In the Palace*, before 1140. Ink and slight colour  
on silk, 28.3 x 168.5 cm. The Cleveland  
Museum of Art, Cleveland.





*Foreign Visitors*, Tang Dynasty, beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Painting from the tomb of Crown Prince Zhanghuai, 242 x 184 cm. Shaanxi History Museum, Xi'an.



Temple of the Six Banyan Trees, 537 (rebuilt 1097).  
Guangzhou (Guangdong province).

## CHAPTER 55

Upon leaving the last city of the kingdom or viceroyalty of Kin-sai, named Gie-za, you enter that of Kon-cha, the principal city of which is named Fu-giu. In the course of six days' journey through this country, in a south-easterly direction, over hills and along valleys, you continually pass towns and villages where the necessities of life are in abundance, and there is much field sport, particularly of birds. The people are idolaters, the subjects of the Grand Khan, and are engaged

in commerce and manufactures. In these parts there are tigers of great size and strength. Ginger and also galangal are produced in large quantities, as well as other drugs. For money equal in value to a Venetian silver groat you may have eighty pounds weight of fresh ginger, so common is its growth. There is also a vegetable which has all the properties of the true saffron, as well the smell as the colour, and yet it is not really saffron. It is held in great estimation, and being an ingredient in all their dishes, it bears, on that account, a high price.

The people in this part of the country are addicted to eating human flesh, esteeming it more delicate than any other, provided the death of the person has not been occasioned by disease. When they advance to combat they throw loose their hair about their ears, and they paint their faces of a bright blue colour. They arm themselves with lances and swords, and all march on foot excepting their chief, who rides on horseback. They are a most savage race of men, insomuch that when they slay their enemies in battle, they are anxious to drink their blood, and afterwards they devour their flesh.

## CHAPTER 56

The road lies over hills, across plains, and through woods, in which are found many of those shrubs from whence the camphor is procured. The country abounds also with game. The inhabitants are idolaters. They are the subjects of the Grand Khan, and within the jurisdiction of Kan-giu. At the end of five days' journey, you arrive at the noble and handsome city of Zai-tun, which has a port on the sea-coast celebrated for the resort of shipping, loaded with merchandise, that is afterwards distributed through every part of the province of Manji. The quantity of pepper imported there is so considerable that what is carried to Alexandria, to supply the demand of the western parts of the world, is trifling in comparison, perhaps not more than the hundredth part. It is indeed impossible to convey an idea of the concourse of merchants and the accumulation of goods, in this which is held to be one of the largest and most commodious ports in the world. The Grand Khan derives vast revenue from this place, as every merchant is obliged to pay ten per cent upon the amount of his investment. The ships are freighted by them at the rate of thirty per cent for fine goods, forty-four for pepper, and for lignum aloes, sandalwood, and other drugs, as well as articles of trade in general, forty per cent, so that it is computed by the merchants, that their charges, including customs and freight, amount to half the value of the cargo; and yet upon the half that remains to them their profit is so considerable, that they are always disposed to return to the same market with a further stock of merchandise. The country is delightful. The people are idolaters, and have all the

necessaries of life in plenty: their disposition is peaceable, and they are fond of ease and indulgence. Many people arrive in this city from the interior parts of India for the purpose of having their persons ornamented by puncturing with needles (in the manner before described), as it is celebrated for the number of its artists skilled in that practice.

The river that flows by the port of Zai-tun is large and rapid, and is a branch of that which passes the city of Kin-sai. At the place where it separates from the principal channel stands the city of Tin-gui. Of this place there is nothing further to be observed, other than that cups or bowls and dishes of porcelain ware are there manufactured. The process was explained to be as follows. They collect a certain kind of earth, as it were, from a mine, and laying it in a great heap, suffer it to be exposed to the wind, the rain, and the sun, for thirty or forty years, during which time it is never disturbed. By this it becomes refined and fit for being wrought into the vessels above mentioned. Such colours as may be thought proper are then laid on, and the ware is afterwards baked in ovens or furnaces. Those people, therefore, who cause the earth to be dug, collect it for their children and grandchildren. Great quantities of the manufacture are sold in the city, and for a Venetian groat you may purchase eight porcelain cups.

We have now described the viceroyalty of Kon-cha, one of the nine divisions of Manji, from whence the Grand Khan draws as ample a revenue as even from that of Kin-sai. Of the others we shall not attempt to speak, because Marco Polo did not himself visit any of their cities, as he has done those of Kin-sai and Kon-cha. It should be observed that throughout the province of Manji one general language prevails, and one uniform manner of writing, yet in the different parts of the country there is a diversity of dialect, similar to what is found between the Genoese, the Milanese, the Florentine, and the dialects of other Italian states, whose inhabitants, although they have each their peculiar speech, can make themselves reciprocally understood.

Not having yet completed the subjects upon which Marco Polo purposed to write, he will now bring this Second Book to a close, and will commence another with a description of the countries and provinces of India, distinguishing it into the Greater, the Lesser, and the Middle India, parts of which he visited whilst employed in the service of the Grand Khan, who ordered him thither upon different occasions of business, and afterwards when, accompanied by his father and uncle, in their returning journey they escorted the Queen destined for King Argon. He will have the opportunity of relating many extraordinary circumstances observed by himself personally in those countries, but at the same time will not omit to notice others of which he was informed by persons worthy of credit, or which were pointed out to him in the sea-chart of the coasts of India.





The Pan Gate as seen from outside the city walls,  
renovated 1344. Suzhou (Jiangsu province).



Buffalo returning from the rice fields,  
Vietnam. Photograph: Loi Nguyễn Khoa.

## **Book III**

### **CHAPTER 57**

Having treated, in the preceding parts of our work, various provinces and regions, we shall now take leave of them and proceed to the account of India, the

admirable circumstances of which shall be related. We shall commence with a description of the ships employed by the merchants, which are built of fir-timber. They have a single deck, and below this the space is divided into about sixty small cabins, fewer or more, according to the size of the vessels, each of them affording accommodation for one merchant. They are provided with a good helm. They have four masts, with as many sails, and some of them have two masts which can be set up and lowered again, as may be found necessary. Some ships of the larger class have, besides the cabins, to the number of thirteen bulk-heads or divisions in the hold, formed of thick planks let into each other (mortised or rabbeted). The object of these is to guard against accidents which may occasion the vessel to spring a leak, such as striking on a rock or receiving a stroke from a whale, a circumstance that not infrequently occurs; for, when sailing at night, the motion through the waves causes a white foam that attracts the notice of the hungry animal. In expectation of meeting with food, it rushes violently to the spot, strikes the ship, and often forces in some part of the bottom. The water, running in at the place where the injury has been sustained, makes its way to the well, which is always kept clear. The crew, upon discovering the situation of the leak, immediately removes the goods from the division affected by the water, which, in consequence of the boards being so well fitted, cannot pass from one division to another. They then repair the damage, and return the goods to that place in the hold from whence they had been taken. The ships are all double-planked; that is, they have a course of sheathing-boards laid over the planking in every part. These are caulked with oakum both within and without, and are fastened with iron nails. They are not coated with pitch, as the country does not produce that article, but the bottoms are smeared over with the following preparation. The people take quick-lime and hemp, the latter of which they cut small, and with these, when pounded together, they mix oil procured from a certain tree, making of the whole a kind of unguent, which retains its viscous properties more firmly, and is a better material than pitch.

Ships of the largest size require a crew of 300 men; others, 200; and some, only 150, according to their greater or lesser bulk. They carry from five to 6,000 baskets (or mat bags) of pepper.

In former times they were of greater burden than they are at present; but the violence of the sea having in many places broken up the islands, and especially in some of the principal ports, there is a want of depth of water for vessels of such draught, and they have on that account been built, in latter times, of a smaller size. The vessels are likewise moved with oars or sweeps, each of which requires four men to work it. Those of the larger class are accompanied by two or three large barks, capable of containing about 1,000 baskets of pepper, and are

manned with sixty, eighty, or one hundred sailors. These small craft are often employed to tow the larger, when working their oars, or even under sail, provided the wind is on the quarter, but not when right aft, because in that case the sails of the larger vessel must becalm those of the smaller, which would, in consequence, be run down. The ships also carry with them as many as ten small boats, for the purpose of carrying out anchors, for fishing, and a variety of other services. They are slung over the sides, and lowered into the water when there is occasion to use them. The barks are in like manner provided with their small boats. When a ship, having been on a voyage for a year or more, stands in need of repair, the practice is to give her a course of sheathing over the original boarding, forming a third course, which is caulked and paid in the same manner as the others; this, when she needs further repairs, is repeated, even to the number of six layers, after which she is condemned as unserviceable and not seaworthy. Having thus described the shipping, we shall proceed to the account of India, but in the first instance we shall speak of certain islands in the part of the ocean where we are at present, and shall commence with the island named Zipangu.





**Liu Songnian** (attributed to), *Streams and Mountains under Fresh Snow* (detail), South Song Dynasty (1127-1279).

Handscroll; ink and colour on silk, 41.6 x 241.3 cm. Gift of John M. Crawford Jr, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

## CHAPTER 58

Zipangu is an island in the eastern ocean, situated at the distance of about 1,500 miles from the mainland, or the coast of Manji. It is of considerable size; its inhabitants have fair complexions, are well made, and are civilised in their manners. Their religion is the worship of idols. They are independent of every foreign power, and governed only by their own kings. They have gold in the greatest abundance, its sources being inexhaustible, but as the King does not allow of its being exported, few merchants visit the country, nor is it frequented by much shipping from other parts. To this circumstance we are to attribute the extraordinary richness of the sovereign's palace, according to what we are told by those who have access to the place. The entire roof is covered with a plating of gold, in the same manner as we cover houses, or more properly churches, with lead. The ceilings of the halls are of the same precious metal; many of the apartments have small tables of pure gold, of considerable thickness; and the windows also have golden ornaments. So vast, indeed, are the riches of the palace, that it is impossible to convey an idea of them. In this island there are pearls also, in large quantities, of a red (pink) colour, round in shape, and of great size, equal in value to, or even exceeding, that of the white pearls. It is customary with one part of the inhabitants to bury their dead, and with another part to burn them. The former have a practice of putting one of these pearls into the mouth of the corpse. There are also found there a number of precious stones.

Of such great celebrity was the wealth of this island that a desire was excited

in the breast of the Grand Khan Kublai, now reigning, to make the conquest of it, and to annex it to his dominions. In order to affect this, he fitted out a numerous fleet, and embarked a large body of troops, under the command of two of his principal officers, one of whom was named Abbacatan, and the other Vonsancin. The expedition sailed from the ports of Zai-tun and Kin-sai, and, crossing the intermediate sea, reached the island in safety; but in consequence of a jealousy that arose between the two commanders, one of whom treated the plans of the other with contempt and resisted the execution of his orders, they were unable to gain possession of any city or fortified place, with the exception of one only, which was carried by assault, the garrison having refused to surrender. Directions were given for putting the whole to the sword, and in obedience thereto the heads of all were cut off, excepting of eight persons who, by the efficacy of a diabolical charm, consisting of a jewel or amulet introduced into the right arm, between the skin and the flesh, were rendered secure from the effects of iron, either to kill or wound. Upon this discovery being made, they were beaten with a heavy wooden club, and presently died.

It happened after some time that a north wind began to blow with great force, and the ships of the Tartars, which lay near the shore of the island, were driven foul of each other. It was determined thereupon, in a council of the officers on board, that they ought to disengage themselves from the land; accordingly, as soon as the troops were re-embarked, they stood out to sea. The gale, however, increased to so violent a degree that a number of the vessels foundered. The people belonging to them, by floating upon pieces of the wreck, saved themselves upon an island lying about four miles from the coast of Zipangu. The other ships, which, not being so near to the land, did not suffer from the storm, and in which the two chiefs were embarked together with the principal officers, or those whose rank entitled them to command 100,000 or 10,000 men, directed their course homewards and returned to the Grand Khan. Those of the Tartars who remained upon the island where they were wrecked, and who amounted to about 30,000 men, finding themselves left without shipping, abandoned by their leaders, and having neither arms nor provisions, expected nothing less than to become captives or to perish, especially as the island afforded no habitations where they could take shelter and refresh themselves. As soon as the gale ceased and the sea became smooth and calm, the people from the main island of Zipangu came over with a large force, in numerous boats, in order to make prisoners of these shipwrecked Tartars, and having landed proceeded in search of them, but in a straggling, disorderly manner. The Tartars, on their part, acted with prudent circumspection, and, being concealed from view by some high land in the centre of the island, whilst the enemy were hurrying in pursuit of them by

one road, made a circuit of the coast by another, which brought them to the place where the fleet of boats was at anchor. Finding these all abandoned, but with their colours flying, they instantly seized them, and pushing off from the island, stood for the principal city of Zipangu, into which, from the appearance of the colours, they were suffered to enter unmolested. Here they found few of the inhabitants besides women, whom they retained for their own use, and drove out all others. When the king was apprised of what had taken place, he was much afflicted, and immediately gave directions for a strict blockade of the city, which was so effectual that not any person was suffered to enter or to escape from it, during six months that the siege continued. At the expiration of this time, the Tartars, despairing of succour, surrendered upon the condition of their lives being spared. These events took place in the course of 1264. The Grand Khan having learned some years after that the unfortunate issue of the expedition was to be attributed to the dissension between the two commanders, caused the head of one of them to be cut off; the other he sent to the savage island of Zorza, where it is the custom to execute criminals in the following manner. They are wrapped round both arms, in the hide of a buffalo freshly taken from the beast, which is sewed tight. As this dries, it compresses the body to such a degree that the sufferer is incapable of moving or in any manner helping himself, and thus miserably perishes.



*Shiva*, Thap Mam style, 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century.  
Sandstone, late polychromy, height: 165 cm.  
Musée Guimet, Paris.





*Brahman, My Son E1 style, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century.*  
High-relief sandstone, height: 72 cm.



*Rama, My Son* E1 style, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century.  
High-relief sandstone, height: 75 cm.



Scale-model of a Buddhist tower,  
11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century. Terracotta.  
Museum of Vietnamese History, Hanoi.

## CHAPTER 59

Steering between south and south-east for 1,500 miles, you reach an island of very great size, named Java, which, according to the reports of some well-informed navigators, is the largest in the world, being in circuit above 3,000 miles. It is under the dominion of one king only, and the inhabitants do not pay tribute to any other power. They are worshippers of idols. The country abounds

with rich commodities. Pepper, nutmegs, spikenard, galangal, cubebs, cloves, and all the other valuable spices and drugs are the produce of the island, which occasions it to be visited by many ships laden with merchandise, that yields to the owners considerable profit. The quantity of gold collected there exceeds all calculation and belief. From thence it is that the merchants of Zai-tun and of Manji in general have imported, and to this day import, that metal to a great amount, and from thence also is obtained the greatest part of the spices that are distributed throughout the world. That the Grand Khan has not brought the island under subjection to him must be attributed to the length of the voyage and the dangers of the navigation.

## CHAPTER 60

In the kingdom of Basman, the people profess obedience to the Grand Khan, but pay him no tribute, and their distance is so great that his troops cannot be sent to these parts. The whole island, indeed, is nominally subject to him, and when ships pass that way the opportunity is taken of sending him rare and curious articles, and especially a particular sort of falcon. In the country are many wild elephants and rhinoceroses, the latter of which are much inferior in size to the elephant, but their feet are similar. Their hide resembles that of the buffalo. In the middle of the forehead they have a single horn, but with this weapon they do not injure those whom they attack, employing only for this purpose their tongue, which is armed with long, sharp spines, and their knees or feet, their mode of assault being to trample upon the person, and then to lacerate him with the tongue. Their head is like that of a wild boar, and they carry it low towards the ground. They take delight in muddy pools, and are filthy in their habits. They are not of that description of animals which suffer themselves to be taken by maidens, as our people suppose, but are quite of a contrary nature. There are found in this district monkeys of various sorts, and vultures as black as crows, which are of a large size and pursue the quarry in a good style.

It should be known that what is reported respecting the dried bodies of diminutive human creatures, or pygmies, brought from India, is an idle tale, such pretended men being manufactured in this island in the following manner. The country produces a species of monkey of a tolerable size and having a countenance resembling that of a man. Those people who make it their business to catch them shave off the hair, leaving it only about the chin, and those other parts where it naturally grows on the human body. They then dry and preserve them with camphor and other drugs, and having prepared them in such a mode that they have exactly the appearance of little men, they put them into wooden



boxes, and sell them to trading people, who carry them to all parts of the world. But this is merely an imposition, the practice being such as we have described; and neither in India, nor in any other country, however wild (and little known), have pygmies been found of a form so diminutive as these exhibit. Sufficient having been said of this kingdom, which presents nothing else remarkable, we shall now speak of another, named Samara.

## CHAPTER 61

Leaving Basman, you enter the kingdom of Samara, being another of those into which the island is divided. In this Marco Polo resided five months, during which, exceedingly against his inclination, he was detained by contrary winds. The North Star is not visible here, nor even the stars that are in the wane. The people are idolaters; they are governed by a powerful prince, who professes himself the vassal of the Grand Khan.

As it was necessary to continue for so long a time at this island Marco Polo established himself on shore, with a party of about 2,000 men; in order to guard against mischief from the savage natives, who seek for opportunities of seizing stragglers, putting them to death, and eating them, he caused a large and deep ditch to be dug around him on the land side, in such manner that each of its extremities terminated in the port, where the shipping lay. This ditch he strengthened by erecting several blockhouses or redoubts of wood, the country affording an abundant supply of that material; being defended by this kind of fortification, he kept the party in complete security during the five months of their residence. Such was the confidence inspired amongst the natives that they furnished supplies of victuals and other necessary articles according to an agreement made with them.

No finer fish for the table can be met with in any part of the world than are found here. There is no wheat produced, but the people live upon rice. Wine is not made; but from a species of tree resembling the date-bearing palm they procure an excellent beverage in the following manner. They cut off a branch, and put over the place a vessel to receive the juice as it distils from the wound, which is filled in the course of a day and a night. So wholesome are the qualities of this liquor, that it affords relief in dropsical complaints, as well as in those of the lungs and of the spleen. When these shoots that have been cut are perceived not to yield any more juice, they contrive to water the trees, by bringing from the river, in pipes or channels, so much water as is sufficient for the purpose; upon this being done, the juice runs again as it did at first. Some trees naturally yield it of a reddish, and others of a pale, colour. The Indian nuts also grow here, of the

size of a man's head, containing an edible substance that is sweet and pleasant to the taste, and white as milk. The cavity of this pulp is filled with a liquid clear as water, cool, and better flavoured and more delicate than wine or any other kind of drink whatsoever. The inhabitants feed upon flesh of every sort, good or bad, without distinction.



*Sitting divinity, 10<sup>th</sup> century.*  
Sandstone, height: 100 cm.  
Private collection.



Ha Long Bay, Vietnam.





*Dog, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century. Sandstone,  
height: 48 cm. Private collection.*

## CHAPTER 62

Angaman is a very large island, not governed by a king. The inhabitants are idolaters, and are a most brutish and savage race, having heads, eyes, and teeth resembling those of the canine species. Their dispositions are cruel, and every person, not being of their own nation, whom they can lay their hands upon, they kill and eat. They have abundance and variety of drugs. Their food is rice and milk, and flesh of every description. They have Indian nuts, apples of paradise,

and many other fruits different from those which grow in our country.

## CHAPTER 63

§ 1. Sailing in a westerly direction sixty miles, you reach the great province of Maabar, which is not an island, but a part of the continent of the Greater India, as it is termed, being the noblest and richest country in the world. It is governed by four kings, of whom the principal is named Sender-bandī. Within his dominions is a fishery for pearls, in the gulf of a bay that lies between Maabar and the island of Zeilan, where the water is not more than from ten to twelve fathoms in depth, and in some places not more than two fathoms. The business of the fishery is conducted in the following manner. A number of merchants form themselves into separate companies, and employ many vessels and boats of different sizes, well provided with ground-tackle, by which to ride safely at anchor. They engage and carry with them persons who are skilled in the art of diving for the oysters in which the pearls are enclosed. These they bring up in bags made of netting that are fastened about their bodies, and then repeat the operation, rising to the surface when they can no longer keep their breath, and after a short interval diving again. In this operation they persevere during the whole of the day, and by their exertions accumulate (in the course of the season) a quantity of oysters sufficient to supply the demands of all countries. The greater proportion of the pearls obtained from the fisheries in this gulf are round, and of a good lustre.

In consequence of the gulf being infested with a kind of large fish, which often prove destructive to the divers, the merchants take the precaution of being accompanied by certain enchanters belonging to a class of Brahmans, who, by means of their diabolical art, have the power of constraining and stupefying these fish, so as to prevent them from doing mischief; as the fishing takes place in the daytime only, they discontinue the effect of the charm in the evening, in order that dishonest persons who might be inclined to take the opportunity of diving at night and stealing the oysters may be deterred by the apprehension they feel of the unrestrained ravages of these animals.

§ 2. The natives of this part of the country always go naked, excepting that they cover with a piece of cloth those parts of the body which modesty dictates. The king is no more clothed than the rest, except that he has a piece of richer cloth, but is honourably distinguished by various kinds of ornaments, such as a collar set with jewels, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies of immense value. He also wears, suspended from the neck and reaching to the breast, a fine silken string containing 104 large and handsome pearls and rubies. The reason for this

particular number is, that he is required by the rules of his religion to repeat a prayer or invocation so many times, daily, in honour of his gods; this his ancestors never failed to perform. The daily prayer consists of these words, *pacauca, pacauca, pacauca*, which they repeat 104 times. He has at the least 1,000 wives and concubines, and when he sees a woman whose beauty pleases him, he immediately signifies his desire to possess her. In this manner he appropriated the wife of his brother, who being a discreet and sensible man, was prevailed upon not to make it the subject of a broil, although repeatedly on the point of having recourse to arms. On these occasions their mother remonstrated with them, and exposing her breasts, said: "If you, my children, disgrace yourselves by acts of hostility against each other, I shall instantly sever from my body these breasts from which you drew your nourishment," and thus the irritation was allowed to subside.



*Shiva Dancing*, Thap Mam style, 12<sup>th</sup> century.  
High-relief sandstone, height: 104 cm.





*Female Dancer,*  
Thap Mam style, 12<sup>th</sup> century.  
Bas-relief sandstone, height: 84 cm.

No horses being bred in this country, the king and his three royal brothers expend large sums of money annually in the purchase of them from merchants of Ormus, Diufar, Pecher, and Adem, who carry them thither for sale, and become rich by the traffic, as they import to the number of 5,000, and for each of them obtain 500 *saggi* of gold, being equal to one hundred marks of silver. At the end of the year, in consequence, as it is supposed, of their not having persons properly qualified to take care of them or to administer the requisite medicines,

perhaps not 300 of these remain alive, and thus the necessity is occasioned for replacing them annually. But it is my opinion that the climate of the province is unfavourable to the race of horses, and that from hence arises the difficulty in breeding or preserving them. For food they give them flesh dressed with rice, and other prepared meats, the country not producing any grain besides rice. A mare, although of a large size, and covered by a handsome horse, produces only a small ill-made colt, with distorted legs, and unfit to be trained for riding.

The following extraordinary custom prevails at this place. When a man who has committed a crime, for which he has been tried and condemned to suffer death, and upon being led to execution declares his willingness to sacrifice himself in honour of some particular idol, his relations and friends immediately place him in a kind of chair, and deliver to him twelve knives of good temper and well sharpened. In this manner they carry him about the city, proclaiming, with a loud voice, that this brave man is about to devote himself to a voluntary death, from motives of zeal for the worship of the idol. Upon reaching the place where the sentence of the law would have been executed, he snatches up two of the knives, and crying out, "I devote myself to death in honour of such an idol," hastily strikes one of them into each thigh, then one into each arm, two into the belly, and two into the breast. Having in this manner thrust all the knives but one into different parts of his body, repeating at every wound the words that have been mentioned, he plunges the last of them into his heart, and immediately expires. As soon as this scene has been acted, his relations proceed, with great triumph and rejoicing, to burn the body; his wife, from motives of pious regard for her husband, throws herself upon the pile, and is consumed with him. Women who display this resolution are much applauded by the community as, on the other hand, those who shrink from it are despised and reviled.

§ 3. These people abstain from drinking wine made from grapes, and should a person be detected in the practice, so disreputable would it be held, that his evidence would not be received in court. A similar prejudice exists against persons frequenting the sea, who, they observe, can only be people of desperate fortunes, and whose testimony, as such, ought not to be admitted. They do not hold fornication to be a crime. The heat of the country is excessive, and the inhabitants on that account go naked. There is no rain excepting in the months of June, July, and August, and if it was not for the coolness imparted to the air during these three months by the rain, it would be impossible to support life.

§ 4. Not only in this kingdom, but throughout India in general, all the beasts and birds are unlike those of our own country, excepting the quails, which perfectly resemble ours; the others are all different. There are bats as large as vultures, and vultures as black as crows, and much larger than ours. Their flight

is rapid, and they do not fail to seize their bird.

In this province of Maabar is the body of the glorious martyr, St Thomas the Apostle, who there suffered martyrdom. It rests in a small city, not frequented by many merchants, because unsuited to the purposes of their commerce; but, from devout motives, a vast number both of Christians and Saracens resort thither. The latter regard him as a great prophet, and name him Ananias, signifying a holy personage. The Christians who perform this pilgrimage collect earth from the spot where he was slain, which is of a red colour, and reverentially carry it away with them, often employing it afterwards in the performance of miracles and giving it, when diluted with water, to the sick, by which many disorders are cured. In the year of our Lord 1288, a powerful prince of the country, who at the time of gathering the harvest had accumulated (as his proportion) a very great quantity of rice, and had not granaries sufficient wherein to deposit it all, thought proper to make use of the religious house belonging to the church of St Thomas for that purpose. This being against the will of those who had the guardianship of it, they beseeched him not to occupy in this manner a building appropriated to the accommodation of pilgrims who came to visit the body of this glorious saint. He, notwithstanding, obstinately persisted. On the following night the holy apostle appeared to him in a vision, holding in his hand a small lance, which he pointed at the throat of the king, saying to him: "If thou dost not immediately evacuate my house which thou hast occupied, I shall put thee to a miserable death." Awaking in a violent alarm, the prince instantly gave orders for doing what was required of him, declaring publicly that he had seen the apostle in a vision. A variety of miracles are daily performed there, through the interposition of the blessed saint. The Christians who have the care of the church possess groves of those trees which produce the Indian nuts, and from thence derive their means of subsistence, paying, as a tax to one of the royal brothers, a groat monthly for each tree. It is related that the death of this most holy apostle took place in the following manner. Having retired to a hermitage, where he was engaged in prayer, and being surrounded by a number of pea-fowls, with which bird the country abounds, an idolater of the tribe of the Gaui, before described, who happened to be passing that way, and did not perceive the holy man, shot an arrow at a peacock, which struck the apostle in the side. Finding himself wounded, he had time only to thank the Lord for all his mercies, and into His hands he resigned his spirit.



*Maya, Mother of Buddha,*  
Dong Duong style, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century.  
Bas-relief sandstone, height: 90 cm.





*Dvarapala*, c. 6<sup>th</sup> century.  
Sculpted sandstone in low-relief,  
height: 160 cm. Private collection.

## CHAPTER 64

Leaving the place where rests the body of the glorious apostle St Thomas, and proceeding westward, you enter the province of Lar, from whence the Bramins, who are spread over India, derive their origin. These are the best and most honourable merchants that can be found. No consideration whatsoever can induce them to speak an untruth, even though their lives should depend upon it.

They have also an abhorrence of robbery or of purloining the goods of other people. They are likewise remarkable for the virtue of continence, being satisfied with the possession of one wife. When any foreign merchant, unacquainted with the usages of the country, introduces himself to one of these, and commits to his hands the care of his adventure, this Bramin undertakes the management of it, disposes of the goods, and renders a faithful account of the proceeds, attending scrupulously to the interests of the stranger, and not demanding any recompense for his trouble, should the owner uncourteously omit to make him the gratuitous offer. They eat meat, and drink the wine of the country. They do not, however, kill any animal themselves, but get it done by the Mahometans. The Bramins are distinguished by a certain badge, consisting of a thick cotton thread, which passes over the shoulder and is tied under the arm, in such a manner that the thread appears upon the breast and behind the back. The King is extremely rich and powerful, and has much delight in the possession of pearls and valuable stones. When the traders from Maabar present to him such as are of superior beauty, he trusts to their word with respect to the estimation of their value, and gives them double the sum that each is declared to have cost them. Under these circumstances, he has the offer of many fine jewels. The people are gross idolaters, and much addicted to sorcery and divination. When they are about to make a purchase of goods, they immediately observe the shadow cast by their own bodies in the sunshine; and if the shadow be as large as it should be, they make the purchase that day. Moreover, when they are in any shop for the purpose of buying anything, if they see a tarantula, of which there are many there, they take notice from which side it comes, and regulate their business accordingly. Again, when they are going out of their houses, if they hear anyone sneeze, they return into the house, and stay at home. They are very abstemious in regard to eating, and live to an advanced age. Their teeth are preserved sound by the use of a certain vegetable which they are in the habit of masticating. It also promotes digestion, and conduces generally to the health of the body.

Amongst the natives of this region there is a class peculiarly devoted to a religious life, who are named *tingui*, and who in honour of their divinities lead most austere lives. They go perfectly naked, not concealing any part of their bodies, and say there can be no shame in that state of nudity in which they came into the world; and with respect to what are called the parts of shame, they observe that, not being with them the organs of sin, they have no reason to blush at their exposure.

They pay adoration to the ox, and carry a small figure of one, of gilt brass or other metal, attached to their foreheads. They also burn the bones of oxen, reduce them to powder, and with this make an unguent for the purpose of

marking various parts of the body, which they do in a reverential manner. If they meet a person with whom they are upon cordial terms, they smear the centre of his forehead with some of these prepared ashes. They do not deprive any creature of life, not even a fly, a flea, or a louse, believing them to be animated with souls, and to feed upon any animal they would consider as a heinous sin. They even abstain from eating vegetables, herbs, or roots, until they have become dry, holding the opinion that these also have souls. They make no use of spoons nor of platters, but spread their victuals upon the dried leaves of the Adam's apple, called likewise apples of paradise. When they have occasion to ease nature, they go to the sea-beach, and having dropped their burden in the sand, immediately scatter it in all directions, to prevent its giving birth to vermin, whose consequent death by hunger would load their consciences with a grievous offence. They live to a great age, some of them even to 150 years, enjoying health and vigour, although they sleep upon the bare earth. This must be attributed to their temperance and chastity. When they die, their bodies are burned, in order for the same reason that they might not breed worms.



*Free-standing Vishnu, 6<sup>th</sup> century.*  
Sandstone, height: 25 cm.





*Free-standing Vishnu,*  
Pre-Angkorian art from the delta,  
7<sup>th</sup> century. Sandstone, height: 19 cm.

## CHAPTER 65

Kael is a considerable city, governed by Astiar, one of the four kings of the country of Maabar, who is rich in gold and jewels, and preserves his country in a state of profound peace. On this account it is a favourite place of resort for foreign merchants, who are well received and treated by the king. Accordingly all the ships coming from the west – as from Ormus, Chisti, Adem, and various

parts of Arabia – laden with merchandise and horses, make this port, which is besides well situated for commerce. The prince maintains in the most splendid manner not fewer than 300 women.

All the people of this city, as well as the natives of India in general, are addicted to the custom of having continually in their mouths the leaf called *tembid*; which they do, partly from habit, and partly from the gratification it affords. Upon chewing it, they spit out the saliva to which it gives occasion. Persons of rank have the leaf prepared with camphor and other aromatic drugs, and also with a mixture of quick-lime. I have been told that it is extremely conducive to health. If it is an object with any man to affront another in the grossest and most contemptuous manner, he spits the juice of this masticated leaf in his face. Thus insulted, the injured party hastens to the presence of the king, states the circumstances of his grievance, and declares his willingness to decide the quarrel by combat. The king thereupon furnishes them with arms, consisting of a sword and small shield, and all the people assemble to be spectators of the conflict, which lasts till one of them remains dead on the field. They are, however, forbidden to wound with the point of the sword.

## CHAPTER 66

Upon leaving Maabar and proceeding 500 miles towards the south-west, you arrive at the kingdom of Koulam. It is the residence of many Christians and Jews, who retain their proper language. The King is not tributary to any other. Much good sappanwood grows there, and pepper in great abundance, being found both in the woody and the open parts of the country. It is gathered in the months of May, June, and July, and the vines which produce it are cultivated in plantations. Indigo also, of excellent quality and in large quantities, is made here. They procure it from a herbaceous plant, which is taken up by the roots and put into tubs of water, where it is suffered to remain until it rots, when they press out the juice. This, upon being exposed to the sun, and evaporated, leaves a kind of paste, which is cut into small pieces of the form in which we see it brought to us.

The heat during some months is so violent as to be scarcely supportable; yet the merchants resort thither from various parts of the world, such, for instance, as the kingdom of Manji and Arabia, attracted by the great profits they obtain both upon the merchandise they import, and upon their returning cargoes. Many of the animals found here are different from those of other parts. There are tigers entirely black, and various birds of the parrot kind, some of them as white as snow, with the feet and the beak red, others whose colours are a mixture of red and azure, and others of a diminutive size. The peacocks also are handsomer and

larger than ours, as well as of a different form, and even the domestic fowls have a peculiar appearance. The same observation will apply to the fruits. The cause of such diversity, it is said, is the intense heat that prevails in these regions. Wine is made from the sugar yielded by a species of palm. It is extremely good, and inebriates faster than the wine made from grapes. The inhabitants possess abundance of everything necessary for the food of man excepting grain, of which there is no other kind than rice; but of this the quantity is very great. Among them are many astrologers and physicians, well versed in their art. All the people, both male and female, are black, and, with the exception of a small piece of cloth attached to the front of their bodies, they go quite naked. Their manners are extremely sensual, and they take as wives their relations by blood, their mothers-in-law, upon the death of their fathers, and the widows of their deceased brothers. But this, as I have been informed, is the state of morals in every part of India.



Hoang Lien Son pass, Lao Cai province (Vietnam).





Islands in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam.

## **CHAPTER 67**

Malabar is an extensive kingdom of the Greater India, situated towards the west, concerning which I must not omit to relate some particulars. The people are governed by their own King, who is independent of every other state, and they have their proper language. In this country the North Star is seen about two fathoms above the horizon. As well here as in the kingdom of Guzzerat, which is not far distant, there are numerous pirates, who yearly scour these seas with more than one hundred small vessels, seizing and plundering all the merchant

ships that pass that way. They take with them to sea their wives and children of all ages, who continue to accompany them during the whole of the summer's cruise. In order that no ships may escape them, they anchor their vessels at the distance of five miles from each other, twenty ships thereby occupying a space of a hundred miles. Upon a trader's appearing in sight of one of them, a signal is made by fire or by smoke, when they all draw closer together, and capture the vessel as she attempts to pass. No injury is done to the persons of the crew, but as soon as they have made prize of the ship, they turn them on shore, recommending to them to provide themselves with another cargo, which, in case of then-passing that way again, may be the means of enriching their captors a second time.

In this kingdom there is vast abundance of pepper, ginger, cubebs, and Indian nuts, and the finest and most beautiful cottons are manufactured that can be found in any part of the world. The ships from Manji bring copper as ballast, and besides this, gold brocades, silks, gauzes, gold and silver bullion, together with many kinds of drugs not produced in Malabar; these they barter for the commodities of the province. There are merchants on the spot who ship the former for Aden, from whence they are transported to Alexandria.

Should we attempt to treat of all the cities of India, the account would be prolix, and prove tiresome. We shall, therefore, touch only upon those respecting which we have particular information.

## **CHAPTER 68**

Distant from Kesmacoran about 500 miles towards the south, in the ocean, there are two islands within about thirty miles from each other, one of which is inhabited by men, without the company of women, and is called the island of males, and the other by women, without men, which is called the island of females. The inhabitants of both are of the same race, and are baptised Christians, but hold the law of the Old Testament. The men visit the island of females, and remain with them for three successive months, namely, March, April, and May, each man occupying a separate habitation along with his wife. They then return to the island of males, where they continue all the rest of the year, without the society of any female. The wives retain their sons with them until they are of the age of twelve years, when they are sent to join their fathers. The daughters they keep at home until they become marriageable, and then they bestow them upon some of the men of the other island. This mode of living is occasioned by the peculiar nature of the climate, which does not allow of their remaining all the year with their wives, unless at the risk of falling a sacrifice.

They have their bishop, who is subordinate to the See of the island of Soccotera. The men provide for the subsistence of their wives by sowing the grain, but the latter prepare the soil and gather in the harvest. The island likewise produces a variety of fruits. The men live upon milk, flesh, rice, and fish. Of these they catch an immense quantity, being expert fishermen. Both when fresh taken and when salted, the fish are sold to the traders resorting to the island, but whose principal object is to purchase ambergris, of which a quantity is collected there.



*Sadashiva*, Orissa or Bengal, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century.  
Copper alloy, 25.1 x 13 x 8.6 cm.  
Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund,  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.





*Vaishnavi Dancing*, Madhya Pradesh or Rajasthan,  
9<sup>th</sup> century. Red sandstone, 74.9 x 36.2 x 15.2 cm. Gift of  
Paul Mellon, Nasali and Alice Heeramanek Collection,  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.

## CHAPTER 69

Upon leaving these islands, and proceeding 500 miles in a southerly direction, you reach the island of Soccotera, which is very large, and abounds with the necessaries of life. The inhabitants find much ambergris upon their coasts, which is voided from the entrails of whales. Being an article of merchandise in great

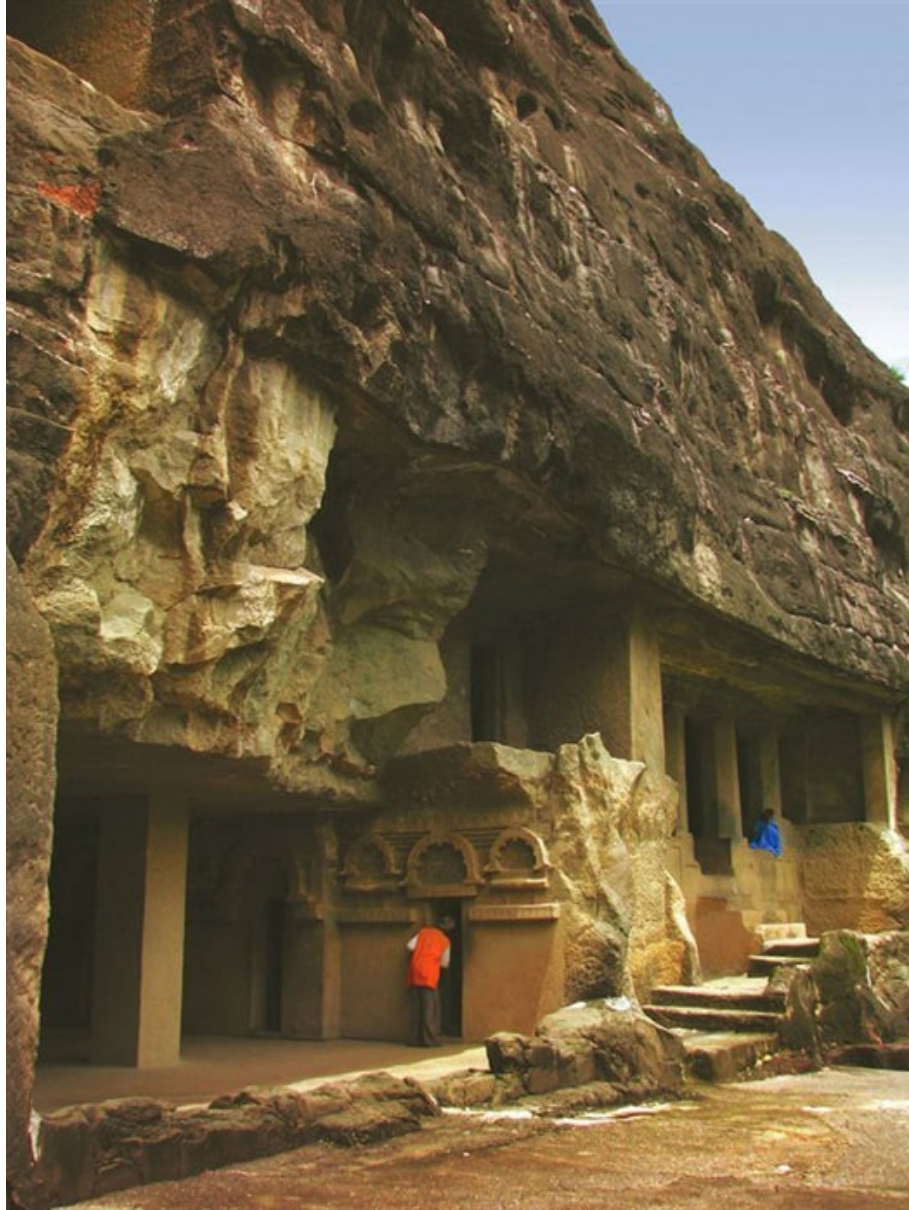
demand, they make it a business to take these fish; this they do by means of a barbed iron, which they strike into the whale so firmly that it cannot be drawn out. To the iron (harpoon) a long line is fastened, with a buoy at the end, for the purpose of discovering the place where the fish, when dead, is to be found. They then drag it to the shore, and proceed to extract the ambergris from its belly, whilst from its head they procure several casks of spermaceti oil.

All the people, both male and female, go nearly naked, having only a scanty covering before and behind, like the idolaters who have been described. They have no other grain than rice, upon which, with flesh and milk, they subsist. Their religion is Christianity, and they are duly baptised, and are under the government, as well temporal as spiritual, of an archbishop, who is not in subjection to the Pope of Rome, but to a Patriarch who resides in the city of Baghdad, by whom he is appointed, or, if elected by the people themselves, by whom their choice is confirmed. Many pirates resort to this island with the goods they have captured, and which the natives purchase of them without any scruple, justifying themselves on the ground of their being plundered from idolaters and Saracens. All ships bound to the province of Aden touch here, and make large purchases of fish and of ambergris, as well as of various kinds of cotton goods manufactured on the spot.

The inhabitants deal more in sorcery and witchcraft than any other people, although forbidden by their Archbishop, who excommunicates and anathematises them for the sin. Of this, however, they make little account, and if any vessel belonging to a pirate should injure one of theirs, they do not fail to lay him under a spell, so that he cannot proceed on his cruise until he has made satisfaction for the damage; even although he should have had a fair and leading wind, they have the power of causing it to change, and thereby of obliging him, in spite of himself, to return to the island. They can, in like manner, cause the sea to become calm, and at their will can raise tempests, occasion shipwrecks, and produce many other extraordinary effects, that need not be particularised.



*Shiva as King of Dancers (Nataraja),*  
Tamil Nadu, Tanjore District, mid-12<sup>th</sup> century.  
Copper alloy, 98.1 x 71.1 x 30.5 cm.  
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund,  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.



Ajanta Caves, started 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.  
Near Aurangabad (Maharashtra).

## CHAPTER 70

Leaving the island of Soccotera, and steering a course between south and southwest for 1,000 miles, you arrive at the great island of Madagascar, which is one of the largest and most fertile in the world. In circuit it is 3,000 miles. The inhabitants are Saracens, or followers of the law of Mahomet. They have four sheikhs, which in our language may be expressed by 'elders', who divide the government amongst them. The people subsist by trade and manufacture, and



sell a vast number of elephants' teeth, as those animals abound in the country, as they do also in that of Zenzibar, from whence the exportation is equally great. The principal food eaten at all seasons of the year is the flesh of camels. That of the other cattle serves them also for food, but the former is preferred, as being both the most wholesome and the most palatable of any to be found in this part of the world. The woods contain many trees of red sandal, and, in proportion to the plenty in which it is found, the price of it is low. There is also much ambergris from the whales, and as the tide throws it on the coast, it is collected for sale. The natives catch lynxes, tigers, and a variety of other animals, such as stags, antelopes, and fallow deer, which afford much sport; as do also birds, which are different from those of our climates.

The island is visited by many ships from various parts of the world, bringing assortments of goods consisting of brocades and silks of various patterns, which are sold to the merchants of the island, or bartered for goods in return, upon all of which they make large profits. There is no resort of ships to the other numerous islands lying further south, this and the island of Zenzibar alone being frequented. This is the consequence of the sea running with such prodigious velocity in that direction as to render their return impossible. The vessels that sail from the coast of Malabar for this island perform the voyage in twenty or twenty-five days, but in their returning voyage are obliged to struggle for three months, so strong is the current of water, which constantly runs southward. The people of the island report that at a certain season of the year, an extraordinary kind of bird, which they call a *ruk*, makes its appearance from the southern region. In form it is said to resemble the eagle, but it is incomparably greater in size, being so large and strong as to seize an elephant with its talons, and to lift it into the air, from whence it lets it fall to the ground, in order that when dead it may prey upon the carcass. Persons who have seen this bird assert that when the wings are spread they measure sixteen paces in extent, from point to point, and that the feathers are eight paces in length, and thick in proportion. Messer Marco Polo, conceiving that these creatures might be griffins, such as are represented in paintings, half birds and half lions, particularly questioned those who reported their having seen them as to this point; but they maintained that their shape was altogether that of birds, or, as it might be said, of the eagle. The Grand Khan, having heard this extraordinary relation, sent messengers to the island on the pretext of demanding the release of one of his servants who had been detained there, but in reality to examine the circumstances of the country, and the truth of the wonderful things told of it. When they returned to the presence of His Majesty, they brought with them (as I have heard) a feather of the *ruk*, positively affirmed to have measured ninety spans, and the quill part to have

been two palms in circumference. This surprising exhibition afforded His Majesty extreme pleasure, and upon those by whom it was presented he bestowed valuable gifts. They were also the bearers of the tusk of a wild boar, an animal that grows there to the size of a buffalo, and it was found to weigh fourteen pounds. The island contains likewise camelopards, asses, and other wild animals, very different from these of our country.



Ajanta Caves, started 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.  
Near Aurangabad (Maharashtra).

## CHAPTER 71

Beyond the island of Madagascar lies that of Zenzibar, which is reported to be in circuit 2,000 miles. The inhabitants worship idols, have their own peculiar language, and do not pay tribute to any foreign power. In their persons they are large, but their height is not proportioned to the bulk of their bodies. Were it otherwise, they would appear gigantic. They are, however, strongly made, and one of them is capable of carrying what would be a load for four of our people. At the same time, he would require as much food as five. They are black, and go naked, covering only the private parts of the body with a cloth. Their hair is so crisp, that even when dipped in water it can with difficulty be drawn out. They have large mouths, their noses turn up towards the forehead, their ears are long, and their eyes so large and frightful, that they have the aspect of demons. The women are equally ill-favoured, having wide mouths, thick noses, and large eyes. Their hands, and also their heads, are disproportionally large. There are, on this island, the most ill-favoured women in the world, with large mouths and thick noses, and ill-favoured breasts, four times as large as those of other women. They feed on flesh, milk, rice, and dates. They have no grape vines, but make a sort of wine from rice and sugar, with the addition of some spicy drugs, very pleasant to the taste, and having the intoxicating quality of the other. In this

island elephants are found in vast numbers, and their teeth form an important article of trade. With respect to these quadrupeds, it should be observed that their mode of copulating is the reverse of that of the brute creation in general, in consequence of the position of the female organ, and follows that of the human species.

In this country is found also the giraffe or *camelopard*, which is a handsome beast. The body is well-proportioned, the forelegs long and high, the hind legs short, the neck very long, the head small, and in its manners it is gentle. Its prevailing colour is light, with circular reddish spots. Its height (or length of the neck), including the head, is three paces. The sheep of the country are different from ours, being all white excepting their heads, which are black; and this also is the colour of the dogs. The animals in general have a different appearance from ours. Many trading ships visit the place, which barter the goods they bring for elephants' teeth and ambergris, of which much is found on the coasts of the island, in consequence of the sea abounding with whales.

The chiefs of the island are sometimes engaged in warfare with each other, and their people display much bravery in battle and contempt of death. They have no horses, but fight upon elephants and camels. Upon the backs of the former they place castles, capable of containing from fifteen to twenty men, armed with swords, lances, and stones, with which weapons they fight. Prior to the combat they give draughts of wine to their elephants, supposing that it renders them more spirited and more furious in the assault.

## CHAPTER 72

Abascia is an extensive country, termed the Middle or Second India. Its principal king is a Christian. Of the others, who are six in number, and tributary to the first, three are Christians and three are Saracens. I was informed that the Christians of these parts, in order to be distinguished as such, make three signs or marks (on the face), namely, one on the forehead, and one on each cheek, the latter of which are imprinted with a hot iron – and this may be considered as a second baptism with fire, after the baptism with water. The Saracens have only one mark, which is on the forehead, and reaches to the middle of the nose. The Jews, who are likewise numerous here, have two marks, and these upon the cheeks.

The capital of the principal Christian king is in the interior of the country. The dominions of the Saracen princes lie towards the province of Aden. The conversion of these people to the Christian faith was the work of the glorious apostle, St Thomas, who having preached the gospel in the kingdom of Nubia,



and converted its inhabitants, afterwards visited Abascia, and there, by the influence of his discourses and the performance of miracles, produced the same effect. He subsequently went to abide in the province of Maabar, where, after converting an infinite number of people, he received, as we have already mentioned, the crown of martyrdom, and was buried on the spot. These people of Abascia are brave and good warriors, being constantly engaged in hostility with the Soldan of Aden, the people of Nubia, and many others whose countries border upon theirs. In consequence of this unceasing practice in arms, they are accounted the best soldiers in this part of the world.

In 1288, as I was informed, this great Abyssinian prince adopted the resolution of visiting in person the Holy Sepulchre of Christ in Jerusalem, a pilgrimage that is every year performed by vast numbers of his subjects, but he was dissuaded from it by the officers of his government, who represented to him the dangers to which he would be exposed in passing through so many places belonging to the Saracens, his enemies. He then determined upon sending thither a bishop as his representative, a man of high reputation for sanctity, who, upon his arrival at Jerusalem, recited the prayers and made the offerings which the King had directed. Returning, however, from that city, through the dominions of the Soldan of Aden, the latter caused him to be brought into his presence, and endeavoured to persuade him to become a Mahometan. Upon his refusing with becoming firmness to abandon the Christian faith, the Soldan, making light of the resentment of the Abyssinian monarch, caused him to be circumcised, and then suffered him to depart. Upon his arrival, and making a report of the indignity and violence to which he had been subjected, the King immediately gave orders for assembling an army, at the head of which he marched, for the purpose of exterminating the Soldan, who on his part called to his assistance two Mahometan princes, his neighbours, by whom he was joined with a very large force. In the conflict that ensued, the Abyssinian king was victorious, and having taken the city of Aden, he gave it up to pillage, in revenge for the insult he had sustained in the person of his bishop.

The inhabitants of this kingdom live upon wheat, rice, flesh, and milk. They extract oil from sesame, and have abundance of all sorts of provisions. In the country there are elephants, lions, camelopards, and a variety of other animals, such as wild asses, and monkeys that have the figure of men, together with many birds, wild and domestic. It is extremely rich in gold, and much frequented by merchants, who obtain large profits.



Mahayan Chaitya-Griha Cave Temple,  
5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century CE, late Gupta period.  
Rock-cut hall. Ajanta cave XXVI,  
near Aurangabad (Maharashtra).



*Maha-Janaka Jataka*, late 6<sup>th</sup> century CE,  
late Gupta period. Detail of a fresco.  
Ajanta caves (Cave I),  
near Aurangabad (Maharashtra).

## CHAPTER 73

The province of Aden is governed by a king, who bears the title of Soldan. The inhabitants are all Saracens, and utterly detest the Christians. In this kingdom there are many towns and castles, and it has the advantage of an excellent port, frequented by ships arriving from India with spices and drugs. The merchants

who purchase them with the intention of conveying them to Alexandria unload them from the ships in which they were imported, and distribute the cargoes on board of other smaller vessels or barks, with which they navigate a gulf of the sea for twenty days, more or less, according to the weather they experience. Having reached their port, they then load their goods upon the backs of camels, and transport them overland (thirty days' journey) to the river Nile, where they are again put into small vessels, called *jermes*, in which they are conveyed by the stream of that river to Kairo, and from thence, by an artificial canal, named Kalizene, at length to Alexandria. This is the least difficult, and the shortest route the merchants can take with their goods, the produce of India, from Aden to that city. In this port of Aden, likewise, the merchants ship a great number of Arabian horses, which they carry for sale to all the kingdoms and islands of India, obtaining high prices for them, and making large profits.

The Soldan of Aden possesses immense treasures, arising from the taxes he lays, as well upon the merchandise that comes from India, as upon that which is shipped in his port as the returning cargo, this being the most considerable mart in all that quarter for the exchange of commodities, and the place to which all trading vessels resort. I was informed that when the Soldan of Babylon led his army the first time against the city of Acre, and took it, this city of Aden furnished him with 30,000 horses and 40,000 camels, stimulated by the rancour borne against the Christians.

## CHAPTER 74

The ruler of this city is a Mahometan, who governs it with exemplary justice, under the superior authority of the sultan of Aden. Its distance from thence is about forty miles to the south-east. Subordinate to it, there are many towns and castles. Its port is good, and it is visited by many trading ships from India, which carry back a number of excellent horses, highly esteemed in that country, and sold there at considerable prices.

This district produces a large quantity of white frankincense of the first quality, which distils, drop by drop, of a certain small tree that resembles the fir. The people occasionally tap the tree, or pare away the bark, and from the incision the frankincense gradually exudes, which afterwards becomes hard. Even when an incision is not made, an exudation is perceived to take place, in consequence of the excessive heat of the climate. There are also many palm trees, which produce good dates in abundance. No grain excepting rice and millet is cultivated in this country, and it becomes necessary to obtain supplies from other parts. There is no wine made from grapes, but they prepare a liquor



from rice, sugar, and dates, that is a delicious beverage. They have a small breed of sheep, the ears of which are not situated like those in others of the species; two small horns grow in the place of them, and lower down, towards the nose, there are two orifices that serve the purpose of ears.

These people are great fishermen, and catch the tunny in such numbers, that two may be purchased for a Venetian groat. They dry them in the sun, and as, by reason of the extreme heat, the country is in a manner burnt up, and no sort of vegetable is to be seen, they accustom their cattle, cows, sheep, camels, and horses, to feed upon dried fish, which being regularly served to them, they eat without any signs of dislike. The fish used for this purpose are of a small kind, which they take in vast quantities during the months of March, April, and May, and when dried, they lay up in their houses for the food of their cattle. These will also feed upon the fresh fish, but are more accustomed to eat them in the dried state. In consequence also of the scarcity of grain, the natives make a kind of biscuit of the substance of the larger fish, in the following manner: they chop it into very small particles, and moisten the preparation with a liquid rendered thick and adhesive by a mixture of flour, which gives to the whole the consistence of paste. This they form into a kind of bread, which they dry and harden by exposure to a burning sun. A stock of this biscuit is laid up to serve them for the year's consumption. The frankincense mentioned before is so cheap in the country as to be purchased by the governor at the rate of ten *besants* (gold ducats) the quintal, who sells it again to the merchants at forty *besants*. This he does under the direction of the Soldan of Aden, who monopolises all that is produced in the district at the above price, and derives a large profit from the resale.



*The 'Dying Princess', 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century CE,  
late Gupta period. Detail of a fresco.  
Ajanta caves (Cave XVI),  
near Aurangabad (Maharashtra).*

## CHAPTER 75

Upon the island of Ormus there is a handsome and large city, built close to the sea. It is governed by a Melik, which is a title equivalent to that of 'lord of the marches' with us, and he has many towns and castles under his authority. The inhabitants are Saracens, all of them professing the faith of Mahomet. The heat that reigns here is extreme; but in every house they are provided with ventilators, by means of which they introduce air to the different floors, and into every apartment, at pleasure. Without this resource it would be impossible to live in the place. We shall not now say more of this city, as in a former book we have given an account of it, together with Kisi and Kerman.

Having thus treated sufficiently at length those provinces and cities of the Greater India which are situated near the sea-coast, as well as of some of the countries of Ethiopia, termed the Middle India, I shall now, before I bring the work to a conclusion, step back, in order to notice some regions lying towards the north, which I omitted to speak of in the preceding books.

It should be known, therefore, that in the northern parts of the world there dwell many Tartars, under a chief of the name of Kaidu, who is of the race of Jengiz Khan, and nearly related to Kublai, the Grand Khan. He is not the subject

of any other prince. The people observe the usages and manners of their ancestors, and are regarded as genuine Tartars. These Tartars are idolaters, and worship a god whom they call Naagai, that is, the 'god of earth', because they think and believe that this god has dominion over the earth, and over all things that are born of it; to this, their false god, they make idols and images of felt, as is described in a former book. Their King and his armies do not shut themselves up in castles or strong places, nor even in towns, but at all times remain in the open plains, the valleys, or the woods, with which this region abounds. They have no corn of any kind, but subsist upon flesh and milk, and live amongst each other in perfect harmony, their King, to whom they all pay implicit obedience, having no object dearer to him than that of preserving peace and union amongst his subjects, which is the essential duty of a sovereign. They possess vast herds of horses, cows, sheep, and other domestic animals. In these northern districts are found bears of a white colour, and of prodigious size, being for the most part about twenty spans in length. There are foxes also whose furs are entirely black, wild asses in great numbers, and certain small animals named *rondes*, which have most delicate furs, and by our people are called *zibelines* or *sables*. Besides these, there are various small beasts of the marten or weasel kind and those which bear the name of 'Pharaoh's mice'. The swarms of the latter are incredible; but the Tartars employ such ingenious contrivances for catching them, that none can escape their hands.

In order to reach the country inhabited by these people, it is necessary to perform a journey of fourteen days across a wide plain, entirely uninhabited desert – a state that is occasioned by innumerable collections of water and springs that render it an entire marsh. This, in consequence of the long duration of the cold season, is frozen over, excepting for a few months of the year, when the sun dissolves the ice and turns the soil to mud, over which it is more difficult and fatiguing to travel than when the whole is frozen. For the purpose, however, of enabling the merchants to frequent their country, and purchase their furs, in which all their trade consists, these people have exerted themselves to render the marshy desert passable for travellers, by erecting at the end of each day's stage a wooden house, raised some height above the ground, where persons are stationed, whose business it is to receive and accommodate the merchants, and on the following day to conduct them to the next station of this kind. Thus they proceed from stage to stage, until they have affected the passage of the desert. In order to travel over the frozen surface of the ground, they construct a sort of vehicle, not unlike that made use of by the natives of the steep and almost inaccessible mountains in the vicinity of our own country, and which is termed a *tragula* or sledge. It is without wheels, is flat at the bottom, but rises with a

semicircular curve in front, by which construction it is fitted for running easily upon the ice. For drawing these small carriages they keep in readiness certain animals resembling dogs, and which may be called such, although they approach the size of asses. They are very strong and inured to the draught. Six of them, in couples, are harnessed to each carriage, which contains only the driver who manages the dogs, and one merchant, with his package of goods. When the day's journey has been performed he quits it, together with that set of dogs, and thus changing both, from day to day, he at length accomplishes his journey across the desert, and afterwards carries with him (in his return) the furs that find their way, for sale, to our part of the world.





*Buddha in the Teaching Posture,*  
5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century CE, late Gupta period.  
Fresco. Ajanta caves (Cave VI),  
near Aurangabad (Maharashtra).





*Lovers, North of Deccan, 6<sup>th</sup> century.  
Ajanta Cave 1, east wall.  
Aurangabad (Maharashtra).*

## CHAPTER 76

Beyond the most distant part of the territory of those Tartars from whence the skins that have been spoken of are procured, there is another region which extends to the utmost bounds of the north, and is called the Region of Darkness, because during most part of the winter months the sun is invisible, and the atmosphere is obscured to the same degree as that in which we find it just about

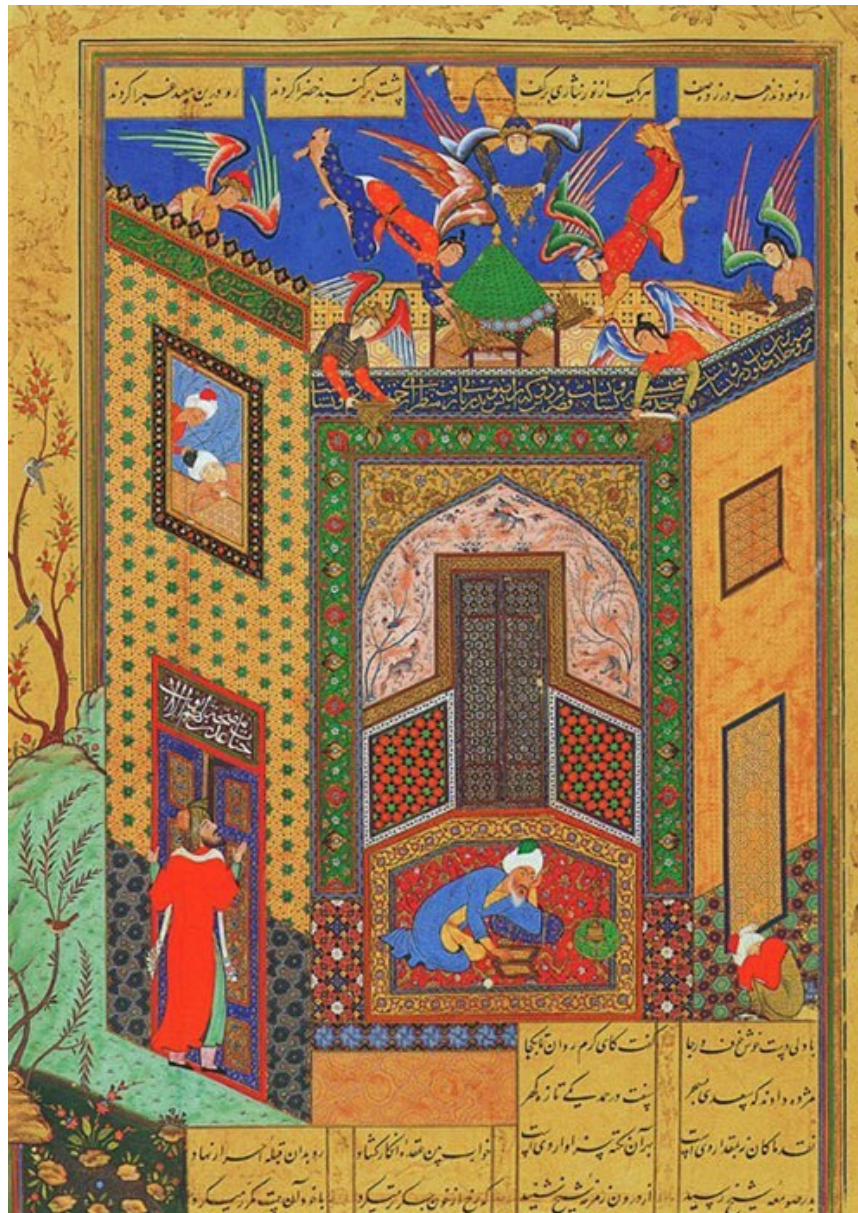
the dawn of day, when we may be said to see and not to see. The men of this country are well-made and tall, but of a very pallid complexion. They are not united under the government of a king or prince, and they live without any established laws or usages, in the manner of the brute creation. Their intellects also are dull, and they have an air of stupidity. The Tartars often proceed on plundering expeditions against these people, to rob them of their cattle and goods. For this purpose they avail themselves of those months in which the darkness prevails, in order that their approach may be unobserved; but, being unable to ascertain the direction in which they should return homeward with their booty, they provide against the chance of going astray by riding mares that have young foals at the time, which latter they suffer to accompany the dams as far as the confines of their own territory, but leave them, under proper care, at the commencement of the gloomy region. When their works of darkness have been accomplished, and they are desirous of revisiting the region of light, they lay the bridles on the necks of their mares, and suffer them freely to take their own course. Guided by maternal instinct, they make their way directly to the spot where they had quitted their foals, and by these means the riders are enabled to regain in safety the places of their residence.

The inhabitants of this (polar) region take advantage of the summer season, when they enjoy continual daylight, to catch vast multitudes of ermines, martens, *arcolini*, foxes, and other animals of that kind, the furs of which are more delicate, and consequently more valuable, than those found in the districts inhabited by the Tartars, who, on that account, are induced to undertake the plundering expeditions that have been described. During the summer, also, these people carry their furs to the neighbouring countries, where they dispose of them in a manner highly advantageous, and, according to what I have been told, some of them are transported even as far as to the country of Russia.



*Alexander at the Kaaba,*  
 based on Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*,  
 mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. Miniature,  
 36 x 21.5 cm. Khalili Collections.





*A Sheikh Meditating in a Pavilion,*

1556-1565. Illustration for Jami's *Haft Aurang*

(*The Seven Thrones*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

## CHAPTER 77

In Great Turkey there is a king called Kaidu, who is the nephew of the Grand Khan, for he was son of the son of Ciagatai, who was brother to the Grand Khan. He possesses many cities and castles, and is a very great lord. He is Tartar, and his men also are Tartar, and they are good warriors, which is no wonder, for they are all men brought up to war; I tell you that this Kaidu never gave obedience to

the Grand Khan, without first making great war. And you must know that this Great Turkey lies to the north-west when we leave Ormus, by the way already mentioned. Great Turkey is beyond the river Ion, and stretches out northward to the territory of the Grand Khan. This Kaidu has already fought many battles with the people of the Grand Khan, and I will relate to you how he came to quarrel with him. You must know for a truth that Kaidu sent word one day to the Grand Khan that he wanted his part of what they had obtained by conquest, claiming a part of the province of Cathay and of that of Manji. The Grand Khan told him that he was quite willing to give him his share, as he had done to his other sons, if he, on his part, would repair to his court and attend his council as often as he sent for him; the Grand Khan willed further that he should obey him like the others his sons and his barons, and on this condition the Grand Khan said that he would give him part of their conquest (of China). Kaidu, who distrusted his uncle the Grand Khan, rejected this condition, saying that he was willing to yield him obedience in his own country, but that he would not go to his court for any consideration, as he feared lest he should be put to death. Thus originated the quarrel between the Grand Khan and Kaidu, which led to a great war, and there were many great battles between them. And the Grand Khan posted an army round the kingdom of Kaidu, to prevent him or his people from committing any injury to his territory or people. But, in spite of all these precautions of the Grand Khan, Kaidu invaded his territory, and fought many times with the forces sent to oppose him. Now King Kaidu, by exerting himself, could bring into the field 100,000 horsemen, all good men, and well trained to war and battle. And moreover he has with him many barons of the lineage of the Emperor, that is, of Jengiz Khan, who was the founder of the Empire. We will now proceed to narrate certain battles between Kaidu and the Grand Khan's people; but first we will describe their mode of fighting. When they go to war, each is obliged to carry with him sixty arrows, thirty of which are of a smaller size, intended for shooting at a distance, but the other thirty are larger, and have a broad blade; these they use near at hand, and strike their enemies in the faces and arms, and cut the strings of their bows, and do great damage with them. And when they have discharged all their arrows, they take their swords and maces, and give one another heavy blows with them.



*Rustam Besieging the Fortress of Kafur,*  
miniature from Ferdowsi's masterpiece *Shahnameh*  
(or *The Book of Kings*), c. 1330.  
Gouache on paper, 21.5 x 13 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.





Portal, The Ark, fortress. Bukhara (Uzbekistan).

In 1266, this King Kaidu, with his cousins, one of whom was called Jesudar, assembled a vast number of people, and attacked two of the Grand Khan's barons, who also were cousins of King Kaidu, though they held their lands of the Grand Khan. One of these was named Tabai or Ciban. They were sons of Ciagatai, who had received Christian baptism, and was brother to the Grand Khan Kublai. Well, Kaidu with his people fought with these, his two cousins, who also had a great army, for on both sides there were about 100,000 horsemen. They fought very hard together, and there were many slain on both sides; but at last King Kaidu gained the victory, and did great damage to the others. But the two brothers, the cousins of King Kaidu, escaped without hurt, for they had good horses which bore them away with great swiftness. Having thus gained the victory, Kaidu's pride and arrogance increased and he returned into his own country, where he remained full two years in peace, without any hostilities between him and the Grand Khan. But at the end of two years Kaidu again assembled a great army. He knew that the Grand Khan's son, named Nomogan, was at Caracorum, and that with him was George the grandson of Prester John, and these two barons had also a very great army of horsemen. King Kaidu, having assembled his host, marched from his own country and, without any occurrence worth mentioning, arrived in the neighbourhood of Caracorum,



where the two barons, the son of the Grand Khan and the grandson of Prester John, were with their army. The latter, instead of being frightened, prepared to meet them with the utmost ardour and courage, and having assembled their whole army, which consisted of not less than 60,000 horsemen, they marched out and established their camp very well and orderly at a distance of about ten miles from King Kaidu, who was encamped with his men in the same plain. Each party remained in their camp till the third day, preparing for battle in the best way they could, for their numbers were about equal, neither exceeding 60,000 horsemen, well armed with bows and arrows, and a sword, mace, and shield to each. Both armies were divided into six squadrons of 10,000 men each, and each having its commander. And when the two armies were drawn up in the field, and waited only for the signal to be given by sounding the *nacar*, they sang and sounded their instruments of music in such a manner that it was wonderful to hear. For the Tartars are not allowed to commence a battle till they hear the *nacars* of their lord begin to sound, but the moment it sounds they begin to fight, and it is their custom, while thus awaiting the signal of battle, to sing and sound their two-corded instruments very sweetly, and make great solace. As soon as the sound of the *nacars* was heard, the battle began, and they put their hands to their bows, and placed the arrows to the strings. In an instant the air was filled with arrows like rain, and you might see many a man and many a horse struck down dead, and the shouting and the noise of the battle was so great that one could hardly have heard God's thunder. In truth, they fought like mortal enemies. And truly, as long as they had any arrows left, those who were able ceased not to shoot; but so many were slain and mortally wounded, that the battle commenced propitiously for neither party. And when they had exhausted their arrows, they placed the bows in their cases, and seized their swords and maces, and, rushing upon each other, began to give terrible blows with them. Thus they began a very fierce and dreadful battle, with such execution upon each other that the ground was soon covered with corpses. Kaidu especially performed great feats of arms, and but for his personal prowess, which restored courage to his followers, they were several times nearly defeated. And on the other side, the son of the Grand Khan and the grandson of Prester John also behaved themselves with great bravery. In a word, this was one of the most sanguinary battles that had ever taken place among the Tartars, for it lasted until nightfall, and in spite of all their efforts, neither party could drive the other from the field, which was covered with so many corpses that it was sorrowful to see, and many a lady that day was made a widow, and many a child an orphan. And when the sun set, both parties gave over fighting, and returned to their several camps to repose during the night. Next morning, King Kaidu, who had received

information that the Grand Khan had sent a very powerful army against him, put his men under arms at daybreak, and, all having mounted, he ordered them to proceed homewards. Their opponents were so weary with the previous day's battle, that they made no attempt to follow them, but let them go without molestation. Kaidu's men continued their retreat, until they came to Samarkand, in Great Turkey.



The Ark, fortress. Bukhara (Uzbekistan).

## CHAPTER 78

You must know, then, that King Kaidu had a daughter named, in the Tartar language, Aigiarm, which means shining moon. This damsel was so strong that there was no young man in the whole kingdom who could overcome her, but she vanquished them all. Her father the King wished her to marry; but she declined, saying that she would never take a husband till she met with some gentleman who should conquer her by force, upon which the King, her father, gave her a written promise that she might marry at her own will. She now caused it to be proclaimed in different parts of the world, that if any young man would come and try strength with her, and should overcome her by force, she would accept him for her husband. This proclamation was no sooner made, than many came from all parts to try their fortune. The trial was made with great solemnity. The King took his place in the principal hall of the palace, with a large company of men and women; then came the King's daughter, in a dress of cendal, very richly adorned, into the middle of the hall; and next came the young man, also in a dress of cendal. The agreement was, that if the young man overcame her so as to throw her by force to the ground, he was to have her for wife; but if, on the contrary, he should be overcome by the King's daughter, he was to forfeit to her a hundred horses. In this manner the damsel gained more than 10,000 horses, for

she could meet with no one able to conquer her, which was no wonder, for she was so well-made in all her limbs, and so tall and strongly built, that she might almost be taken for a giantess. At last, around 1280, there came the son of a rich king, who was very beautiful and young; he was accompanied with a very fine retinue, and brought with him 1,000 beautiful horses. Immediately on his arrival, he announced that he was come to try his strength with the lady. King Kaidu received him very gladly, for he was very desirous to have this youth for his son-in-law, knowing him to be the son of the King of Pamar, on which account, Kaidu privately told his daughter that he wished her on this occasion to let herself be vanquished. But she said she would not do so for anything in the world. Thereupon the King and Queen took their places in the hall, with a great attendance of both sexes, and the King's daughter presented herself as usual, and also the King's son, who was remarkable no less for his beauty than for his great strength. Now when they were brought into the hall, it was, on account of the superior rank of the claimant, agreed as the conditions of the trial that if the young prince were conquered, he should forfeit the 1,000 horses he had brought with him as his stake. This agreement having been made, the wrestling began, and all who were there, including the King and Queen, wished heartily that the prince might be the victor, that he might be the husband of the princess. But, contrary to their hopes, after much pulling and tugging, the King's daughter gained the victory, and the young prince was thrown on the pavement of the palace, and lost his 1,000 horses. There was not one person in the whole hall who did not lament his defeat. After this the King took his daughter with him into many battles, and not a cavalier in the host displayed so much valour, and at last the damsel rushed into the midst of the enemy, and seizing upon a horseman, carried him off to her own people.

## CHAPTER 79

The first lord of the Tartars of the West was Sain, who was a very great and powerful king. He conquered Russia, and Comania, and Alania, and Lac, and Mengiar, and Zic, and Gucia, and Gazaria. All these provinces were conquered by King Sain. Before this conquest, they were all Comanians, but they were not under one government, and through their want of union they lost their lands, and were dispersed into different parts of the world; those who remained were all in a state of serfdom to King Sain. After King Sain reigned King Patu, after him King Berca, next King Mungletemur, then King Totamongur, and lastly Toctai, who now reigns. Having thus given you a list of the Kings of the Tartars of the West, we will tell you of a great battle that fell out between Alau, the lord of the



East, and Berca, the lord of the West, as well as the cause of the battle, and its result.

## **CHAPTER 80**

In 1261, there arose a great quarrel between King Alau, lord of the Tartars of the East, and Berca, king of the Tartars of the West, on account of a province which bordered on each of their territories, which both claimed, and each was too proud to yield to the other. They mutually defied each other, each declaring that he would go and take it, and he would see who dared hinder him. When things had come to this point, each summoned his followers to his banner, and they exerted themselves to such a degree that within six months each had assembled full 300,000 horsemen, very well furnished with all things appertaining to war according to their usage. Alau, lord of the East, now began his march with all his forces, and they rode many days without meeting with any adventure worth mentioning. At length they reached an extensive plain, situated between the Iron Gates and the Sea of Sarain, in which they encamped in good order, and there was many a rich pavilion and tent. And there Alau said he would wait to see what course Berca would follow, as this spot was on the borders of the two territories.



Gate of Felicity, Topkapi Palace, c. 15<sup>th</sup> century.  
Marble, paint, and gold leaf. Istanbul (Constantinople).



Çifte Minareli Medrese, c. 1250.  
Erzurum (Turkey).





Tomb of Tamerlane, Gur-e Amir Complex.  
Samarkand (Uzbekistan).





Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus,  
Hagia Sophia, 532-537. Ashlar and brick,  
82 x 73 x 55 m. Istanbul (Constantinople).

## CHAPTER 81

When Alau knew certainly that Berca was come with so great an army, he also assembled his chiefs, and addressed them as follows: “Fair brothers, and sons, and friends,” said he, “you know that all my life I have prized you and assisted you, and hitherto you have assisted me to conquer in many battles, nor ever were you in any battle where we failed to obtain the victory, and for that reason are we come here to fight this great man Berca; and I know well that he has more men than we have, but they are not so good, and I doubt not but we shall put them all to flight and discomfiture. We know by our spy that they intend to give us battle three days hence, of which I am very glad, and I pray you all to be ready on that day, and to conduct battle as you used to do. One thing only I wish to impress upon you, that it is better to die on the field in maintaining our

honour, than to suffer discomfiture; so let each of you fight so that our honour may be safe, and our enemies discomfited and slain.”

Thus each of the kings encouraged his men, and waited for the day of the battle, and all prepared for it in the best way they could.

## CHAPTER 82

When the day fixed for the battle arrived, Alau rose early in the morning, called his men to arms, and marshalled his army with the utmost skill. He divided it into thirty squadrons, each squadron consisting of 10,000 horsemen, and to each he gave a good leader and a good captain. And when all this was duly arranged, he ordered his troops to advance, which they did at a slow pace, until they came halfway between the two camps, where they halted and waited for the enemy. On the other side, King Berca had drawn up his army, which was arranged in thirty-five squadrons, exactly in the same manner as that of Alau's, and he also ordered his men to advance, which they did within half a mile of the others. There they made a short halt, and then they moved forward again till they came to the distance of about two arbalest shots of each other. It was a fair plain, and wonderfully extensive, as it ought to be, when so many thousands of men were marshalled in hostile array, under the two most powerful warriors in the world, who moreover were near kinsmen, for they were both of the imperial lineage of Jengiz Khan. After the two armies had remained a short while in face of each other, the *nacars* at length sounded, upon which both armies let fly such a shower of arrows at each other that you could hardly see the sky, and many were slain, man and horse. When all their arrows were exhausted, they engaged with swords and maces, and then the battle was so fierce that the noise was louder than the thunder of heaven, and the ground was covered with corpses and reddened with blood. Both the kings distinguished themselves by their valour, and their men were not backward in imitating their example. The battle continued in this manner till dusk, when Berca began to give way, and fled, and Alau's men pursued furiously, cutting down and slaying without mercy. After they had pursued a short distance, Alau recalled them, and they returned to their tents, laid aside their arms, and dressed their wounds, and they were so weary with fighting, that they gladly sought repose. Next morning Alau ordered the bodies of the dead to be buried, enemies as well as friends, and the loss was so great on both sides that it would be impossible to describe it. After this was done, Alau returned to his country with all his men who had survived the battle.



**Pietro Lombardo**, Santa Maria  
dei Miracoli, 1481-1489. Venice.

# Conclusion

*When our author left the court of Peking, about the year 1291, Kaidu, however nominally the vassal of Kublai, was actually independent, and, notwithstanding some checks, was still a powerful prince. It would seem that, from the period of the latter's effecting the entire conquest of China – and instead of holding it as a province, placing himself on the throne, and identifying himself with its line of monarchs – the other princes of the family of Chingis Khan considered him as having virtually abandoned the Mongul-Tartar empire, founded by their common ancestor, and assumed, or attempted to assume, as sovereignties, those vast dominions which they held only as fiefs. Such will appear to have been the state of things in Persia, and in Western as well as in Northern Tartary.*

*Marco Polo, the subject of this memoir, was born in Venice in 1254. He was the son of Nicolo Polo, a Venetian of noble family, who was one of the partners in a trading house, engaged in business with Constantinople. In 1260, this Nicolo Polo, in company with his junior partner, his brother Maffeo, set out across the Euxine on a trading venture to the Crimea. They prospered in their business, but were unable to return to their base, owing to the breaking out of a Tartar war on the road by which they had come. As they could not go back, they went forward, crossing the desert to Bokhara, where they stayed for three years. At the end of the third year (the fifth of their journey) they were advised to visit the Great Khan Kublai, the “Kubla Khan” of Coleridge's poem.*

*A party of the Great Khan's envoys were about to return to Cathay, and the two brothers therefore joined the party, travelling forward, “northward and north-eastward”, for a whole year, before they reached the Khan's court in Cathay. The Khan received them kindly, and asked them many questions about life in Europe, especially about the Emperors, the Pope, the Church, and “all that is done in Rome”. He then sent them back to Europe on an embassy to the Pope, to ask His Holiness to send a hundred missionaries to convert the Cathaians to the Christian faith. He also asked for some of the holy oil from the lamp of the Holy Sepulchre.*

*The return journey of the brothers (from Cathay to Acre) took three years. On their arrival at Acre the travellers discovered that the Pope was dead. They therefore decided to return home to Venice to wait until the new Pope should be elected. They arrived at Venice in 1269, to find that Nicolo's wife had died during her husband's absence. His son Marco, our traveller, was then fifteen years old. He had probably passed his childhood in the house of one of his*



uncles in Venice.

Nicolo and Maffeo Polo remained in Venice for a couple of years, waiting for a Pope to be elected, but as there seemed to be no prospect of this happening, they determined to return to the Great Khan, to tell him how their mission had failed. They therefore set out again (in 1271) and Marco, now seventeen years old, went with them.

At Acre they obtained a letter from a Papal Legate, stating how it came about that the message had not been delivered. They had already obtained some of the holy oil, so that they were free to proceed. They had not gone very far upon their journey when they were recalled to Acre by the above-mentioned Syrian Legate, who had just heard that he had been elected Pope. The new Pope did not send a hundred missionaries, as Kublai had asked, but he appointed instead two preaching friars, who accompanied the Polos as far as Armenia, where rumours of war frightened them into returning.

The Polos journeyed on for three and a half years, and arrived at the Khan's court (at Shangtu, not far from Pekin) in the middle of 1275. The Khan received them "honourably and graciously", making much of Marco, "who was then a young gallant". In a little while, when Marco had learned the speech and customs of the "Tartars", the Khan employed him in public business, sending him as a visiting administrator to several wild and distant provinces. Marco noted carefully the strange customs of these provinces, and delighted the Khan with his account of them. On one of these journeys Marco probably visited the southern states of India.

After some seventeen years of honourable service with Kublai, the three Venetians became eager to return to Venice. They were rich men, and Kublai was growing old, and they knew that Kublai's death "might deprive them of that public assistance by which alone they could expect to surmount the innumerable difficulties of so long a journey". But Kublai refused to allow them to leave the court, and even "appeared hurt at the application". It chanced, however, that at this time, Arghun, Khan of Persia, had sent ambassadors to Kublai to obtain the hand of a maiden "from among the relatives of his deceased wife".

The maiden, aged seventeen, and very beautiful, was about to accompany the ambassadors to Persia; but the ordinary overland routes to Persia were unsafe, owing to wars among the Tartars. It was necessary for her to travel to Persia by ship. The envoys begged Kublai that the three Venetians might come with them in the ships "as being persons well skilled in the practice of navigation". Kublai granted their request, though not very gladly. He fitted out a splendid squadron of ships, and dispatched the three Venetians with the Persians, first granting them the golden tablet, or safe conduct, which would enable them to obtain

supplies on the way. They sailed from a Chinese port about the beginning of 1292.

The voyage to Persia occupied about two years, during which time the expedition lost 600 men. The Khan of Persia was dead when they arrived, so the beautiful maiden was handed over to his son, who received her kindly. He gave the Venetians safe conduct through Persia; indeed he sent them forward with troops of horses, without which, in those troubled days, they could never have crossed the country. As they rode on their way they heard that the Great Khan Kublai, their old master, had died. They arrived safely in Venice sometime in 1295.

There are some curious tales of their arrival at home. It is said that they were not recognised by their relatives, and this is not strange, for they returned in shabby Tartar clothes, almost unable to speak their native tongue. It was not until they had ripped the seams of the shabby clothes, producing stores of jewels from the lining, that the relatives decided to acknowledge them. (This tale may be read as allegory by those who doubt its truth as history.)

Marco Polo did not stay long amongst his relatives. Venice was at war with Genoa, and the Polo family, being rich, had been called upon to equip a galley, even before the travellers returned from Asia. Marco Polo sailed in command of this galley, in the fleet under Andrea Dandolo, which was defeated by the Genoese off Curzola on the 7 September 1296.

Marco Polo was carried as a prisoner to Genoa, where he remained, in spite of efforts made to ransom him, for about three years, during which time he probably dictated his book in very bad French to one Rustician of Pisa, a fellow prisoner. He returned to Venice during the year 1299, and probably married shortly afterwards.

Little is known of his life after his return from prison. We know that he was nicknamed "Il Milione" on account of his wonderful stories of Kublai's splendour; but as he was rich and famous the slighting nickname was probably partly a compliment.

Colonel Yule, the great editor of Marco Polo, has discovered that he stood surety for a wine-smuggler, that he gave a copy of his book to a French noble, and that he sued a commission agent for the half profits on the sale of some musk. It was at one time thought that he was the Marco Polo who failed (in 1302) to have his water-pipe inspected by the town plumber. This sin has now been laid upon another man of the same name, who "was ignorant of the order on that subject".



**Canaletto** (Giovanni Antonio Canal),  
*View of St Mark's Square, Venice*, 1723.  
Oil on canvas, 141.5 x 204.5 cm.  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.



Banknote depicting Marco Polo,  
issued from 1982-1988. Italy.

*On the 9 January 1324, feeling himself to be growing daily feebler, he made his will, which is still preserved. He named as his trustees his wife Donata and his three daughters, to whom the bulk of his estate was left. He died soon after the execution of this will. He was buried in Venice outside the door of the Church of San Lorenzo, but the exact site of the grave is unknown. No known authentic portrait of the man exists, but as in the case of Columbus, there are several fanciful portraits (of which the best dates from the 17th century).*

*Marco Polo's book was not received with faith by his contemporaries. Travellers who see marvellous things, even in our own day (the name of Bruce will occur to everyone) are seldom believed by those who, having stayed at home, have all the consequences of their virtue. When Marco Polo came back from the East, a misty, unknown country, full of splendour and terrors, he could not tell the whole truth. He had to leave his tale half-told lest he should lack believers. His book was less popular in the later Middle Ages than the fictions and plagiarisms of Sir John Mandeville.*

*Marco Polo tells of what he saw; the compiler of Mandeville (when he does not steal openly from Pliny Friar Odoric) and others, tells of what an ignorant person might expect to see, and would, in any case, like to read about, since it is always blessed to be confirmed in an opinion, however ill-grounded it may be. How little Marco Polo was credited may be judged from the fact that the map of Asia was not modified by his discoveries until fifty years after his death.*



*His book is one of the great books of travel. Even now, after the lapse of six centuries, it remains the chief authority for parts of Central Asia, and of the vast Chinese Empire. Some of his wanderings are hard to follow; some of the places which he visited are hard to identify; but the labour of Colonel Yule has cleared up most of the difficulties, and confirmed most of the strange statements. To the geographer, to the historian, and to the student of Asiatic life, the book of Marco Polo will always be most valuable. To the general reader, the great charm of the book is its romance.*

*It is accounted a romantic thing to wander among strangers and to eat their bread by the campfires of the other half of the world. There is romance in doing thus, though the romance has been overestimated by those whose sedentary lives have created in them a false taste for action.*

*Marco Polo wandered amongst strangers; but it is open to anyone (with courage and the power of motion) to do the same. Wandering in itself is merely a form of self-indulgence. If it adds not to the stock of human knowledge, or if it gives not to others the imaginative possession of some part of the world, it is a pernicious habit. The acquisition of knowledge, the accumulation of fact, is noble only in those few who have that alchemy which transforms such clay to heavenly eternal gold.*

*It may be thought that many travellers have given their readers great imaginative possessions; but the imaginative possession is not measured in miles and parasangs, nor do the people of that country write accounts of birds and beasts. It is only the wonderful traveller who sees a wonder, and only five travellers in the world's history have seen wonders. The others have seen birds and beasts, rivers and wastes, the earth and the (local) fullness thereof. The five travellers are Herodotus, Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar, and Marco Polo himself. The wonder of Marco Polo is this – that he created Asia for the European mind.*

*When Marco Polo went to the East, the whole of Central Asia, so full of splendour and magnificence, so noisy with nations and kings, was like a dream in men's minds. Europeans touched only the fringe of the East. At Acre, at Byzantium, at the busy cities on the Euxine, the merchants of Europe bartered with the stranger for silks, and jewels, and precious balms, brought over the desert at great cost, in caravans from the unknown.*



St Mark's Basilica, rebuilt 1063-1094.  
Marble, bronze, gilded mosaic,  
76.5 x 62.5 m. Venice.

*The popular conception of the East was taken from the Bible, from the tales of old Crusaders, and from the books of the merchants. All that men knew of the East was that it was mysterious, and that our Lord was born there. Marco Polo, almost the first European to see the East, saw her in all her wonder, more fully than any man has seen her since. His picture of the East is the picture which we all make in our minds when we repeat to ourselves those two strange words, "the East", and give ourselves up to the image which that symbol evokes. It may be that the Western mind will turn to Marco Polo for a conception of Asia long after "Cathay" has become an American colony.*

*It is difficult to read Marco Polo as one reads historical facts. One reads him as one reads romance, as one would read, for instance, the Eve of St Mark, or the Well at the World's End. The East of which he writes is the East of Romance, not the East of the Anglo-Indian, with his Simla, his missions to Tibet, and Reuter telegrams. In the East of Romance there grows "the tree of the sun", or "dry tree" (by which Marco Polo passed), a sort of landmark or milestone, at the end of the great desert. The apples of the sun and moon grow upon that tree.*

*Darius and Alexander fought in its shade. Those are the significant facts about the tree according to Marco Polo. We moderns, who care little for any tree so soon as we can murmur its Latin name, have lost wonder in losing faith.*

*All who have read the stories of The Thousand and One Nights must be acquainted with the size and powers of an extraordinary bird, there called the roc; but its celebrity is not confined to that work. "Rukh," says the Arabic and Persian Dictionary, "is the name of a monstrous bird, which is said to have powers sufficient to carry off a live rhinoceros." Its existence seems, indeed, to have been universally credited in the East; and those Arabian navigators with whom our author conversed would not hesitate to attest to a fact of such notoriety; but they might find it convenient, at the same time, to lay the scene of its appearance at a place so little frequented as the southern extremity of Madagascar, because the chances were small of any contradiction from local knowledge. The circumstance, however, of its resorting thither from the southern ocean, gives room to a conjecture that the tale, although exaggerated, may not be altogether imaginary, and that it may have taken its rise from the occasional sight of a real bird of vast, although not miraculous dimensions. This may be either the albatross (*diomedea exulans*), which, although the inhabitant of more southern latitudes, may accidentally visit the shores of Madagascar, or the condor of southern Africa. Some of the former are known to measure no less than fifteen feet between the extremities of the wings, and must appear to those who see them for the first time an extraordinary phenomenon.*

*The Middle Ages, even as our own age is, were full of talk of the Earthly Paradise. It may be that we have progressed, in learning to talk of it as a social possibility, instead of as a geographical fact. We like to think that the old Venetians went eastward, on their famous journey, half believing that they would arrive there, just as Columbus (two centuries later) half expected to sight land "where the golden blossoms burn upon the trees forever". They did not find the Earthly Paradise; but they saw the splendours of Kublai, one of the mightiest of earthly kings.*

*One feels the presence of Kublai all through the narrative, as the red wine dropped into the water-cup suffuses all, or as the string supports the jewels on a trinket. The imagination is only healthy when it broods upon the kingly and the saintly. In Kublai, the reader will find enough images of splendour to make glorious the temple of his mind. When we think of Marco Polo, it is of Kublai that we think, and, apart from the romantic wonder which surrounds him, he is a noble person, worth our contemplation. He is like a king in a romance. It was the task of a kingly nature to have created him as he appears in the book here. It makes us proud and reverent of the poetic gift, to reflect that this king, "the lord*

*of lords”, ruler of so many cities, so many gardens, so many fish-pools, would be but a name, an image covered by the sands, had he not welcomed two dusty travellers, who came to him one morning from out of the unknown, after long wandering over the world. Perhaps when he bade them farewell the thought occurred to him (as it occurred to that other king in the poem) that he might come to be remembered “but by this one thing”, when all his glories were fallen from him, and he lay silent, the gold mask upon his face, in the drowsy tomb, where the lamp, long kept alight, at last guttered, and died, and fell to dust.*

*JOHN MASEFIELD, December 1907.*





**Canaletto** (Giovanni Antonio Canal),  
*The Dogana in Venice*, c. 1724-1730.  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 63.4 cm.  
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna.

# Index

## Architecture, Landscape, Photographs

[Ajanta Caves 1, 2](#)  
[Ananda Temple](#)  
[The Ancient city of Lijiang](#)  
[Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, Hagia Sophia](#)  
[The Ark, fortress](#)  
[Buffalo returning from the rice fields](#)  
[Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum](#)  
[Childhood home of Marco Polo](#)  
[Çifte Minareli Medrese](#)  
[City walls, Itchan Kala](#)  
[Corner watch tower on the wall of the inner Beijing palace](#)  
[Courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus](#)  
[Dome of the Rock](#)  
[Dome of the Treasury, Great Mosque of Damascus](#)  
[Dome of the Treasury, Great Mosque of Damascus \(detail\) 1, 2](#)  
[Exterior entrance to the tomb of Tamerlane, Gur-e Amir Complex](#)  
[Exterior view, The Ark, fortress](#)  
[Exterior view, Ulugh Beg Madrasah](#)  
[Façade detail of the Ulugh Beg Madrasah courtyard](#)  
[Fakhr al-Din al-Razi Mausoleum](#)  
[Fortress walls, The Ark](#)  
[Gate of Felicity, Topkapi Palace](#)  
[The Gate of Supreme Harmony](#)  
[Gur-e Amir Mausoleum](#)  
[Ha Long Bay](#)  
[Hall entrance to Khirbat al-Mafjar](#)  
[Hoang Lien Son pass](#)  
[Imperial stele written by Emperor Qianlong \(1735-1796\) of Qian Dynasty](#)  
[Interior view including minbar, Jameh Mosque of Nain](#)  
[Interior view towards the courtyard, Ukhaydir Palace](#)  
[Islands in Ha Long Bay](#)  
[Jameh Mosque of Isfahan](#)  
[Kazi Zade Rumi Mausoleum](#)  
[Magoki-Attari Mosque](#)

[Mahayan Chaitya-Griha Cave Temple](#)  
[Manar Jomban](#)  
[Marco Polo Bridge \(or Lugou Bridge\)](#)  
[Marshes of southern Iraq, heavily relied on for fishing and agricultural purposes throughout the Middle East](#)  
[Ming Tombs](#)  
[National Library of China \(formally known as the Imperial Wenyuange Library\)](#)  
[Pagoda of Tianning Temple](#)  
[The Pan Gate as seen from outside the city walls](#)  
[Part of the Great Wall, Qinglong \(Black Dragon\) Gorge](#)  
[Portal and minarets, Jameh Mosque of Yazd](#)  
[Portal, Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis](#)  
[Portal, The Ark, fortress 1, 2](#)  
[Portal, Turabek-Khanym Mausoleum](#)  
[Samanid Mausoleum](#)  
[Sand dunes in the Gobi desert](#)  
[Santa Maria dei Miracoli, \*\*Pietro Lombardo\*\*](#)  
[Shah-i-Zinda Mausoleum](#)  
[Shwedagon Pagoda](#)  
[St Mark's Basilica](#)  
[Temple of Heaven, Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests](#)  
[Temple of the Six Banyan Trees](#)  
[Tomb of Tamerlane, Gur-e Amir Complex](#)  
[View of the Gobi Desert](#)  
[Xi'an city wall of the old Tang imperial city](#)  
[Yungang Grottos](#)

## **Decorative Art**

[Banknote depicting Marco Polo](#)  
[Bowl](#)  
[Bucket, \*\*Muhammad ibn Nasir ibn Muhammad al-Harawi\*\*](#)  
[Caftan with Senmurvs \(detail\)](#)  
[Ewer](#)  
[Jug with the face of a goddess](#)  
[Pitcher](#)  
[Seal](#)  
[Tile](#)  
[Tray 1, 2](#)

[Vase](#)

[Vessel](#)

[Wine vessel with pattern of dragons](#)

[Xuanwu \(black tortoise\) statue](#)

## **Drawings, Etchings, Paintings**

[\*The Abduction by Sea\*, \*\*Amir Khusraw Dihlavi\*\*](#)

[\*Alexander at the Kaaba\*, based on Ferdowsi's \*Shahnameh\*](#)

[\*Buddha in the Teaching Posture\*](#)

[\*A Chinese Dignitary\*](#)

[\*Dancer\*, Mogao Cave 217](#)

[\*The Dogana in Venice\*, \*\*Canaletto\*\*](#)

[\*The 'Dying Princess'\*](#)

[\*Folio from a \*Shahnameh\* \(Book of Kings\) by Ferdowsi\*](#)

[\*Foreign Visitors\*](#)

[\*Ladies of the Court\*, detail of the handscroll \*In the Palace\*, \*\*Zhou Wenju\*\* \(after a work attributed to\)](#)

[\*Lovers\*](#)

[\*Maha-Janaka Jataka\*](#)

[\*Map of the Mediterranean and Atlantic\* \(detail\), \*\*Guillelmus Soleri\*\*](#)

[\*Map of the Mediterranean and Baltic\*, \*\*Angelino Dulcert\*\*](#)

[\*Map of the Mediterranean and Black Sea\* \(detail\), \*\*Albertinus Virga\*\*](#)

[\*Marco Polo Leaves Venice on His Famous Journey to the Far East\*](#)

[\*Marco Polo with Elephants and Camels Arriving at Hormuz on the Gulf of Persia from India\* \(detail\), \*\*Boucicaut Master\*\*](#)

[\*Mogao Cave 272\*](#)

[\*Mystical Tipsiness in the Garden of Sultan Husayn Mîrzâ Bayqarâ\*, \*\*Master Mîrak and his disciple Bihzâd\*\* 1, 2](#)

[\*Offering Bearers\*](#)

[\*Parade of the Guild of Glassblowers before the Ottoman Sultan Murâd III in the Old Hippodrome of Constantinople\*](#)

[\*Portrait of a Painter\*](#)

[\*Prince and Lady under Flowering Branch\*](#)

[\*Prince Humay before Princess Humayun's Palace\*, \*\*Junayd\*\*](#)

[\*Rustam Besieging the Fortress of Kafur\*](#)

[\*Scene from the Tale of the Goose\*](#)

[\*A Sheikh Meditating in a Pavilion\*](#)

[\*Spring Ride Guo Guo\* \(detail\), \*\*Hui Zong\*\*](#)

[\*Streams and Mountains under Fresh Snow\* \(detail\), \*\*Liu Songnian\*\* \(attributed](#)



to)

Sultan Sanjar Waylaid by the Old Woman Complaining of the Misconduct of His Troops

Venetian Traveller Marco Polo, Gaetano Bonutti

View of St Mark's Square, Venice, Canaletto

Water Atlas of the Mediterranean, Petrus Vesconte 1, 2

Women Observing Birds and Cicada

Young Maids with Flowers in Their Hair (detail), Zhougant (attributed to)

## **Sculptures**

The bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara

The bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Puxian)

Bodhisattvas in main Longmen Grotto

Brahman

Crowned head

Dog

Dvarapala

Female Dancer

Figure of Avalokiteśvara, seated in position of a variant form of 'rājalīlāsana' (royal ease)

Free-standing Vishnu 1, 2

Guanyin of the Southern Sea

Guanyin of the Southern Sea (detail)

Luohan (arhat)

Maya, Mother of Buddha

Probably Shakyamuni (Shijiamouni), the Historical Buddha

Rama

Relief carving of Dhritarashtra, Guardian of the East, on the inner wall of the Cloud Platform at Juyongguan

Sadashiva

Scale-model of a Buddhist tower

Seated bodhisattva

Seated bodhisattva Târâ in her "Green Manifestation"

Seated figure of a luohan (arhat)

Seated six-armed Avalokiteśvara (Amoghapâûa, Bukongjuansuo Guanyin)

Shiva

Shiva as King of Dancers (Nataraja)

Shiva Dancing

Sitting divinity

*Standing bodhisattva*

Stone elephant at the tomb of Emperor Zhezong

*Vaishnavi Dancing*